The Rebels

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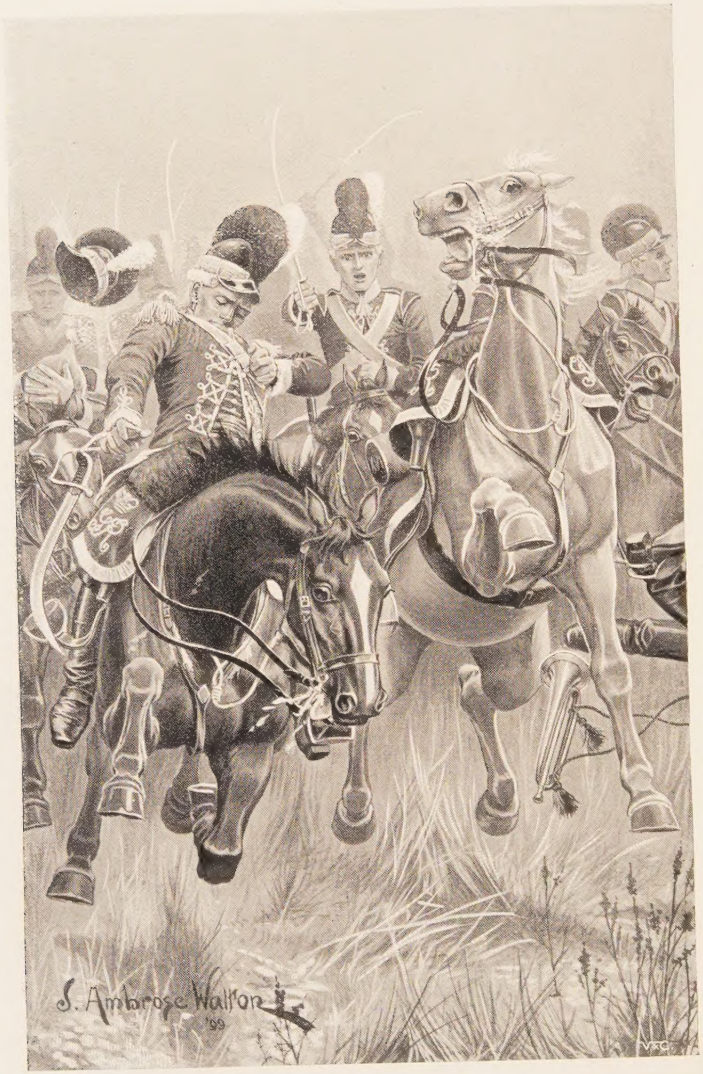
THE REBELS



"A withering cross fire swept the foremost troopers from their saddles." *(Page 233.)*

THE REBELS

By M. McDonnell Bodkin Q.C

AUTHOR OF
"A STOLEN LIFE" "WHITE
MAGIC"

"Who fears to speak of Ninety Eight?
Who blushes at the name?
When cowards mock the patriot's fate
Who hangs his head for shame?"

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Chapter I

RIPENING REBELLION

"That bombshells, grape, an' powder, 'n' ball,
Air good will's strongest magnets;
And peace, to make it stick at all,
Must be druv in with bagnets."

"I'LL make these Irish savages as tame as cats before I'm done with them," said Lord Clare, breaking in abruptly on the quiet talk of Lord Camden and Sir Ralph Abercombie, who sat at his right hand in the place of honour.

His harsh, loud voice made itself heard half way down the long, gaily-decorated table in the great dining-hall of Dublin Castle, where a state dinner was in progress, and a silence fell upon the gay company. It was the sullen silence that follows the first thunder-clap when all the air is electric with the coming storm.

Lady Camden glanced a quick summons to the lady opposite. With much rustling of silk and flickering of jewels in the myriad candle-light, the gay procession trooped out of the dining-room. On the threshold, each lady turning—

a brilliant picture framed for a moment in the doorway of dark mahogany—dropped a demure curtsey to royalty's representative at the table's head and vanished.

Sir Ralph Abercombie restrained himself with manifest effort while the ladies were still in the room. A frown gathered on his frank, soldierly face, and his hand that lay on the table clenched so tight that the knuckles showed white.

"My Lord Clare," he cried, as the door closed on the last of the bright procession, "you speak, methinks, somewhat harshly of your own countrymen."

"I own no kindred with brutes," the other answered haughtily, "though I chanced to be born in the same island."

"Not the people, but the people's persecutors, that name 'brute' fits best, my Lord Clare," Sir Ralph replied with equal heat. "I, who have been scarce a fortnight in the country, am already half maddened by the savageries I have witnessed."

"When you have lived as long as we amongst the Irish rebels," was the sneering rejoinder, "you will not be so chicken-hearted."

"As a stranger I am the less biassed judge," Sir Ralph said, speaking quietly, though suppressed anger trembled in his voice. "You

wrong yourself, Lord Clare; you wrong yourself to jest or sneer on such a theme. If you had seen what I have seen you would be as wroth as I."

"I reserve my wrath for the king's enemies, not for the king's friends, Sir Ralph. Zeal in the good cause must not be too harshly judged. I make allowance for the provocation which the Royalists have received from the rebels. They do well to be angry, though their anger to the over-squeamish may sometimes seem to savour of severity."

"Savour of severity!" Sir Ralph repeated angrily. "Blind, brutal butchery are the true and honest words. I have never known men more degraded than these, your loyalists. There is a regiment of fencibles, calling themselves 'Ancient Britons,' who are grosser savages than the Britons who ran naked in the woods before the Romans came. Cossacks and Calmucks were gentle by comparison."

He turned from Lord Clare to Lord Camden, who listened uneasily to the duel between them. "Your Excellency," he went on, "I was out with my aide-de-camp about a week ago, near Newry. We had ridden over twenty miles of country as peaceable as any in the world—there was not so much as an angry word

spoken. Suddenly we heard the sound of firing about a mile away. As we breasted the rising ground we found hell let loose in the quiet valley beyond. The smoke and flame guided us. A village was on fire, every house burning, and all around the place—even to the burning threshold of the cabins—the ground was strewn with dead and dying women and children. It was the Ancient Britons that had done this devil's work without a shadow of provocation. As I shall answer to Almighty God I believe not a blow was struck, not a shot fired but their own. I found twenty killed outright, many wounded, and eleven houses burned to the ground. The loyalist heroes marched to their quarters with the honours of war, many of them carrying the severed hands or heads of their victims on sword or bayonet-point as they marched."

There was a moment's silence at the table. Even the most callous there seemed cowed for a moment by the passionate indignation in his voice.

Lord Clare alone was quite unmoved. "Most like a nest of rebels exterminated," he answered lightly; "at the worst a stern reprisal instilling a salutary terror in the disturbers of the peace."

"Nor was this a solitary outrage," Sir Ralph

went on, contemptuously ignoring Lord Clare. "It is part of a damnable system secretly countenanced by the Castle, pursued without provocation or excuse, or even resistance, for which your Excellency's Government cannot escape the responsibility. The next day the Ancient Britons were again on the warpath. Two of them, half drunk, straggled from their troop and lost their way. They came to the gate of a Catholic gentleman, a loyal gentleman I am assured. They knocked noisily at the gate with their sword-hilts, and it was opened to them by a young lad of eighteen, whom these two ruffians —I can find no other name for them—literally hacked to pieces for his civility. The thing was made a jest of in the regiment, and I failed to secure inquiry, much less punishment."

"I have heard, Sir Ralph," Lord Camden responded, with a feeble smile and a blinking of his eyes, "that those 'Ancient Britons,' commanded by Sir William Wynn — a most distinguished officer you will admit—at their first landing showed, perhaps, too great an attachment to the sword exercise which they had recently learned. But they have proved themselves active and loyal, and the terror of the disaffected, and their protection is eagerly sought after by the loyal gentry of the district."

"Sir Ralph Abercombie has been singularly unfortunate," chimed in Lord Clare with a sneer. "All the Royalists he found were ruffians, and all the papists and rebels innocent victims. Of any one whose own loyalty was doubtful I should be tempted to say he found what he wanted to find."

Sir Ralph flushed at the insult, but before he could answer, Lord Moira, with an angry sparkle in his eye, broke in from the opposite side of the table:

"You are not tempted to call me disloyal, my Lord Clare, I trust? If so I will find time and place to answer you. I am no rebel and no stranger in Ireland, but heart and soul I am with Sir Ralph in what he has said. He thinks and speaks as any man must who has eyes to see and heart to feel. Let me repeat at your table, my Lord Camden, what I have already said on the floor of the British House of Lords. These excesses, perpetrated in the outraged name of law and order, are the most absurd, as well as the most disgraceful, tyranny ever a nation groaned under. If they are persevered in—I told those English lords, and I now tell your Excellency,—they will lead to a deep and universal hatred of the very name of England. Men's houses have been burned to the ground; whole

towns have been threatened on mere suspicion of a reluctance to surrender arms, with no proof that they had any arms to surrender. In many cases men have bought arms for the purpose of surrendering them. The torture of the pitch cap is a common amusement of the soldiery. I have myself known instances," he went on impetuously, growing more excited with the remembrance, "of men picketted till they fainted, when they recovered picketted again till they fainted, recovered again and again picketted till they fainted a third time; all this in order to extract from the tortured wretches a confession either of their own or of their neighbours' guilt of some imaginary crime. I could go further. Men have been half-hanged and then brought to life again in order, by fear of a repetition of that horrible punishment, to force them—innocent or guilty—to confession."

As Lord Moira spoke he looked fixedly at a tall man in the gorgeous uniform of a general, who sat at the table three places down from Lord Clare. A handsome man with a kind of animal beauty. But the forehead was low and narrow, the cheeks flushed, and the thick lips sensual and cruel. He met the challenge of Lord Moira's indignant eyes with a careless grin, while he tossed off a brimming bumper of port

so hastily that the red drops splashed on the white damask of the tablecloth.

"You are too squeamish, my Lord Moira," he answered. "You cannot cure fever without a little blood-letting. We must use the means at our hands. Soldiers are soldiers, not saints nor school-girls. They may be a bit rough sometimes, but they are zealous and loyal. It would be madness to discourage them. To my thinking there has been already too much coddling of the rebels. The contagion spreads and must be stamped out. I think if military law were proclaimed, and one or two of these large towns were burned down unless arms of every kind were produced, it would have a very good effect indeed. Meanwhile the houses of some of the most disaffected should be set fire to at once and the badgers smoked out. You may call this cruelty to the rebels, my Lord Moira, if that pleases you. I call it mercy to the well-disposed."

"Does your Excellency hold these views of my Lord Lake?" Sir Ralph asked, turning to Lord Camden, and making no effort to conceal the scorn in his voice.

Lord Camden trifled with his jewelled snuff-box, and slid the rim of his half-filled glass backwards and forwards on the glossy damask before he answered.

"Lord Lake puts it a little too roughly perhaps," he said at last. "I am, of course, against all unnecessary cruelty. But you will admit that there are times when we cannot be too squeamish and strait-laced. At any cost, zeal and loyalty must be encouraged."

"Zeal and loyalty! You don't call wanton savagery by those fine names! Let me give you just one other sample of zeal and loyalty as they are preached and practised in Ireland—only one more, and I have done. It is not pleasant to speak of such things. Two of your zealous loyalists—Orange yeomen this time—were out in Kildare on patrol duty; that is the polite name for reckless maraudering. The country was desolate, the people had fled in all directions, fearing such 'mercy' as my Lord Lake recommends. As the two loyalists passed a clump of trees, they heard a rustling in the underwood. Instantly the foremost fired his piece point-blank into the centre of the stir. A sharp cry of pain followed the shot. The other levelled his musket in turn. Before he could fire his comrade threw up his arm. 'Let us first call on the d——d rebel to surrender,' he said. Then, at the word of command, there scrambled out of the bush a lean, half-naked woman, with five lean, naked children at her heels. She carried a sixth in her arms. There was a

bullet-hole in the little bare thigh, from which a red stream gushed, dabbling the poor mother's bosom in her child's blood. The gallant fellows carried their prisoners in triumph to the barracks, all except one. The wounded child was left to die and rot at the wood's edge. Next day the mother was flogged till she told where a batch of pikes were hid."

"But she did tell, and the pikes were found. That's the point," spoke the hoarse voice of Mr. Judkin Fitzgerald from near the bottom of the table. "I'd flog the rebel's hide off her for that."

"Even on your own showing, Sir Ralph," Lord Clare interposed smilingly, "this woman was the ally and accomplice of papist miscreants, who had planned murder, and had the weapons ready to commit it. A danger to the well-disposed was averted by her capture. Such severity as you describe is, of course, very much to be deplored; but the necessity for such severity is still more deplorable. The military power must not be tampered with or weakened; it is our sole bulwark against anarchy."

"What worse horrors has anarchy itself to fright us with?" Sir Ralph replied hotly. "Our army is to be relied upon for savagery, not fighting. The license which has been encouraged or con-

doned makes it formidable to every one except the enemy."

"There are no complaints from the loyal and law-abiding," Lord Camden urged.

"In that your Excellency is ill-informed," said Henry Grattan, speaking now for the first time, and speaking slowly, as one who has to keep guard lest his anger master him. "The other day a great meeting of the loyalists of Armagh, summoned and presided over by the loyalist High-Sheriff, declared 'that the British Constitution was enjoyed only in name in Ireland,' and, in language more intemperate than the rebels, denounced the corruption of Parliament, and the coercion of the people."

"What would you have, Grattan; what would you have?" interrupted Lord Camden fretfully. "When rebellion is rife, we must take such means as we can to suppress it. You would not give anarchy fair play, would you?"

"To the wild spirit of anarchical liberty," Grattan answered, "I would oppose the regulated spirit of organized liberty."

"The fustian of the French Revolution," Lord Clare muttered between his teeth to the man beside him at the table; then he added out loud: "These are pretty platitudes, if you will forgive my saying so. The Government does the work of

a Government, and does it well. It enforces respect for authority and protection for property; what more is needed?"

"What more indeed?" Grattan echoed bitterly. "A dominion of spies and their masters, of bribers and bribed, in which the people have no influence, and from which the people have no hope, is truly a Government to be grateful for."

"The devil himself hot from hell could not devise a worse one!" cried Sir Laurence Parsons impetuously.

Lord Clare stared haughtily at the last speaker; Lake bit his coarse tawny moustache with a savage frown; while ferocious Judkin Fitzgerald glanced from Parsons to Lord Clare as a bull-dog looks to its master for orders.

For a moment it seemed as if the Viceregal table would be disgraced by violence, so hot the temper of these men burned. But the placid voice of the Lord-Lieutenant stilled the tumult while he affected to ignore it.

"You are a little hard on the Government, Mr. Grattan," he said pleasantly. "But we must take things as we find them; there is no remedy."

"Your Excellency knows my remedy."

"Candidly, I don't."

"Do what Lord Fitzwilliam would have done, if he had not most unhappily been recalled. Open

the portals of the Constitution to the Catholics, who are the main body of the people."

"The thing is impossible. Their admission would be fatal to the Empire."

"That is a hard saying."

"It is a true one," said Lord Clare impatiently, taking the word from the Viceroy.

"Have you thought what it means?" Grattan went on, still addressing himself to Lord Camden. "If you tell the Catholics that the connection with England is for your advantage, not theirs; if you tell them that it means, and must always mean, misery, insult, and degradation in their own land, can you expect their loyalty for that connection? At the first chance they will fly from your arms, which are never raised but to oppress them."

"Loyalty can be enforced," Lord Clare answered tartly; "and the Government is strong enough to enforce it."

"You cannot force men's minds," Grattan answered solemnly. "Like the mist that creeps at the countrymen's heels, a sullen, slowly rising discontent will envelope the land, only waiting the chance to explode in violence."

"Let it explode," cried Lord Clare; "I ask nothing better. Aye, and I will take measures to ensure the explosion; then, in its own hot blood, we will stifle this sedition."

"We must be cruel only to be kind," said the soft voice of Lord Castlereagh, and a gentle smile was on his smooth, young face as he spoke; "out of evil good comes. I hate unnecessary cruelty; but statesmanship cannot be too nice in its choice of means. A union between the two countries is cheap even at the cost of a rebellion."

"Suppose you succeed in this savage purpose," Grattan answered indignantly, his dark eyes on fire, his deep voice quivering, "what is your success—a grinding despotism, or the mockery of a union? A union founded on hate, on savage wrongs cruelly inflicted and sullenly endured; a union to make Ireland miserable and England weak. I, at least, will take no further part in a Parliament that tolerates such a policy."

"Nor I," said Sir Ralph Abercombie, "in an army engaged in such a war."

But Lord Camden, laying a restraining and persuasive hand on his arm, whispered, "You must not desert us, Sir Ralph." The Lord-Lieutenant himself rose from the table as he spoke. His rising was a signal to the company, and again averted a scene.

A few—Grattan, Lord Moira, and Parsons amongst them—left the Castle instantly, not to cross its threshold again. But by far the greater number crossed the long antechamber to the

brilliantly-lit drawing-room, where women—beautiful in rich array, in the sheen of silk and mist of muslin, and the flickering of countless jewels—twittered about "the horrid papists and rebels," whose wickedness made the fashionable gossip of the day.

As Lord Clare passed with the throng of men, some more than half-tipsy, through the dining-room door, he felt his sleeve pulled, and, turning, he saw the plump figure and genial face of his under-secretary, Edward Cooke, moving away into the shadow of the corridor, and beckoning him to follow.

Chapter II

THE SUPERSENSITIVE SPY

"The evil that thou causest to be done
That is thy means to live. Do thou but think
What 'tis to cram a maw or cloak a back
From such a filthy vice."

"WELL," said Lord Clare impatiently, the instant they got clear of the throng, "what mare's nest have you found now, Cooke?" The flush of anger was still on his cheek and its sparkle in his fierce black eyes.

But the bland under-secretary took not the least notice of his ill-temper. By a deprecatory gesture he entreated silence, and led the way down a long narrow passage towards the lower Castle yard, till the half-open drawing-room was only a bright slit in the distance, through which came glimpses of light and colour, and the musical tinkle of a harp.

Cooke's pleasant face was full of mystery and self-importance. His great secret was bursting from him. He only wanted to be questioned. But Lord Clare was still too much ruffled by the scene

in the dining-room to notice Cooke's strange eagerness. He sought a vent in words for the choler that was choking him.

"You heard, Cooke. You heard the whining and snarling of that Scotch beast, Abercombie, and the prig Moira and rebel Grattan joining in the howl. We must get the fellow out of the country, or he will ruin all. Lake is our man. He is thorough, whatever else he is. There is no one like him to smoke out those crafty foxes, and then hunt rebellion to the death in the open. Abercombie would quiet things down without violence, and leave discontent still smouldering. He is, with Grattan and Moira and the rest of those seditious dogs, all for what they call peaceful reform. I tell you, Cooke, we must have rebellion, real, red-hot rebellion, before there is a chance for the Union. Mark my words, before three weeks are over I'll have this puling Scotchman clean out of the country, and Lord Lake Commander-in-Chief in Ireland. But what's the matter with you, man?" he broke off with a glance, half annoyed, half amused at Cooke's face. "I don't believe you heard a word I said. Why, you look wiser than ever man was. What mysterious conspiracy is on foot now? Come, out with it."

Cooke's great secret had almost strangled him. Clare's question was an intense relief. "My

Lord," he answered pompously and slowly, in spite of his eagerness, "I have succeeded at last. I hold the conspiracy and the conspirators in the hollow of my hand. When I close it I crush them." He stretched out his right hand, and opened and closed the short, pudgy fingers with a tragic gesture.

"Stop, stop, Cooke!" Lord Clare cried laughingly. "Don't close it just yet. Give the rogues a long day."

Cooke was hurt by his patron's levity. "My lord, my lord," he answered, "believe me, I have news of vital importance to the Government, to the Empire, and to your lordship."

The earnestness of his voice captured Clare's attention at last. "Do you mean it, man? Is it possible you have laid hands on——"

"On the supreme directorate itself. One of their body, stung by remorse at the enormities they contemplated and——"

"Cut it short, Cooke," broke in Lord Clare impatiently. "You mean we have got the spy we wanted so long and could not find. By God, this is glorious news, if true! A rebellion without leaders and without arms won't be hard to deal with."

"We must be cautious, my lord, we must be cautious," the cunning under-secretary replied. "The people may not rise when their leaders

are trapped. Then good-bye to our hope of a union."

"Oh, we will find means to stir them up!" Lord Clare retorted, with a short laugh that sounded like a snarl. "Trust Lord Lake and martial law for that. This miserable maudlin Abercombie must go. Lake is the very man to raise them and lay them."

"Do nothing hastily, my lord, I entreat. We have the leaders now, when we want them. Give them rope enough."

"Oh, I will give them rope enough, I promise you!" said Lord Clare grimly.

The two men passed out together into the lower Castle yard. There was no moon, but the broad face of Heaven was sprinkled with innumerable stars, twinkling placidly away in the regions of uttermost space, heedless of the petty plans, the vile passions, the plannings and the strivings of the microscopic insect, man, on the speck of star dust called the earth. The night wind blew softly, cooling their faces flushed with wine. But they took no heed of the night's beauty.

"This spy of yours, Cooke," Lord Clare asked, "who is he—where is he?"

"Here; waiting for us here," Cooke answered placidly. "Reynolds is the man's name, Thomas Reynolds. I have found him hard to manage. He stands a good deal on his gentility and his honour

and his conscience. You must humour him, my lord."

"I'll pay him" said Lord Clare shortly; "that's more to the purpose. Where is the fellow?"

"Straight on."

Cooke leading the way, they passed through a narrow door at the far corner of the yard, up a dark staircase into a large low room, dimly lit by a single lamp. At the far end of the room a man waited, standing, a faint outline of darkness in the dusk. As the door opened the man started, and drew the long black cloak he wore closer about him. Lord Clare's hand settled quietly on the butt of the loaded pistol that never left him night or day. Cooke very quietly turned the key in the door and crossed to where the shadow stood, the light glinting on the points of steel and diamond as he moved. Lord Clare stood still at the door, his hand thrust carelessly into his bosom, resting on the pistol-butt.

"Mr. Reynolds," Cooke said smoothly, "I have brought you Lord Clare, as you desired. He fully understands and appreciates the honourable motives that have impelled you to disclose the guilty secrets of this treasonable conspiracy into which you were so treacherously trapped. Have no fear; you can speak openly before him."

He touched the spy on the arm and drew him

gently towards Lord Clare, who stood within the narrow circle of the lamplight. The light, as it touched the spy, showed a tall young man, from twenty-five to thirty years of age, with a high cone-shaped head and a face that would have been almost handsome but for the mouth, which was thick-lipped, sensual, and cruel. He made a formal, not ungraceful, bow to Lord Clare, who responded with a lifting of his eyebrows.

"My Lord Clare," the spy began in a somewhat theatrical voice, "this is indeed to me a most painful situation."

"It might be worse, sir, much worse," Lord Clare interrupted briskly. "It is likely to prove much more painful for your associates, I think."

The spy's theatrical manner dropped from him like a cloak. His eyes blinked nervously under Lord Clare's fierce gaze, and his nether lip fell. "I was trapped into the conspiracy," he stammered out; "I cannot be held responsible. I thought its sole object was peaceful reform."

"D——n your peaceful reform," growled Lord Clare under his breath.

"I found to my horror that revolution, massacre, and anarchy were aimed at. I have suffered the fell agony of remorse, my lord. A false pride urged me to shield my guilty and treacherous comrades; but true honour and conscience com-

manded me to save my suffering country, at whatever cost to my own personal feelings."

"Quite right, Mr. Reynolds, quite right," Cooke murmured approvingly. "That resolution is very much to the credit of your head and heart, Mr. Reynolds."

"What do you know—what can you tell us?" curtly demanded Lord Clare.

He stood as he spoke with one foot on the seat of the only chair in the room, and his fierce black eyes fixed on the spy. At the first clear look he got at Reynolds's face he had drawn his hand from his bosom, and he now fiddled carelessly with the lid of his gold snuff-box.

"What can I tell, my lord?—everything," the spy answered effusively. "My lord, I have been innocently drawn into the centre of this vile conspiracy."

"You said all that before; come to business. Do you know the names of the members of the supreme directorate?"

Reynolds nodded.

"Who are they?"

The spy drew himself up with a fine assump- of dignity; pose and speech had plainly been carefully rehearsed. "You will pardon me, my Lord Clare, but these men have been my dearest friends, and trusted me. I find it hard to hand

them over to certain death, richly deserving of death though they may be."

"You have put your hand to the plough, Mr. Reynolds," Cooke whispered soothingly, "and you must not look back. Remember, your country's happiness is at stake."

"I appreciate your scruples, sir," said Lord Clare. "How much?"

The pale face of the spy flushed at this rough insult brutally flung at him. "My lord, my lord," he faltered out in stammering protest, "I do not understand your lordship. You totally mistake my motives."

"His lordship merely means that the Government cannot allow you to suffer pecuniary loss by your self-devotion," Cooke interposed, with an entreating look at Lord Clare.

"I will accept no money for the performance of this most painful duty," said Reynolds stoutly; "I will not have the purity of my motives misconstrued."

Lord Clare shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Get the fellow to name his price, Cooke," he muttered under his breath.

"My dear Mr. Reynolds," Cooke went on, "this refusal does you infinite credit. But we cannot allow you to suffer in your private fortune by your service to the Government. You may, perhaps,

wish to leave the country; travelling is very expensive. It will cost you, perhaps, five hundred pounds to get away."

"A thousand at least," interrupted Reynolds.

"Quite right, quite right, my mistake; let us say a thousand for that. Then, of course, your fine mansion-house and valuable estate may have to be deserted. We cannot possibly put that down at less than——"

"Five thousand pounds," again interrupted Reynolds.

Cooke shot a quick questioning glance at Lord Clare. Then he gulped down the big figure, and repeated, "Very reasonable indeed."

"I have made my resolution," Reynolds said heroically, "and I will abide by it. No personal consideration of danger or advantage can influence me in the least. If you will insist in forcing upon me compensation for the bare loss I must sustain, I cannot reasonably refuse. The rest I suppose I must bear as best I may, sustained by the approval of my own conscience. My home abandoned, my income forfeited, even my motives, it is quite possible, misconstrued; a beggar and fugitive on the face of the earth; yet with this one supreme consolation that I have saved my country.

Cooke cast another look at Lord Clare, who nodded impatiently.

"His Majesty's ministers," said this bland mediator between the greedy spy and his contemptuous employer; "His Majesty's ministers could never allow such devoted self-sacrifice to be made, such privations to be endured by the patriotic preserver of the Empire. They will insist on your accepting a pension of five hundred a year for life."

Mr. Reynolds waved a deprecatory hand.

"No! no! there can be no refusal. The Government insist. What I have said, Mr. Reynolds, is confirmed by the authority of my Lord Clare."

"Your lordship asked me for the names of the supreme directorate just now," said Reynolds, handing him a paper.

Lord Clare got closer to the lamp, and read over the list twice, gloating and purring with delight. He broke off suddenly, turning a sharp look on the spy. "I don't find Grattan's name here."

"Grattan is not an United Irishman, my lord."

"Indeed. But Lord Edward Fitzgerald at least is one of the leaders, as I happen to know. Why is his name omitted from the list?"

The question came so sharply that Reynolds stammered out, "A pure accident, my lord. I thought his name was there."

Lord Clare eyed him sternly. "In matters of this kind believe me, Mr. Reynolds, you cannot be

too careful for your own sake. Now we have got the names, it is true, but that is a small matter without clear proofs."

"I can put the men themselves into your lordship's hands."

"Come, that's better, much better. When and how?"

"On the 12th of March next there will be a meeting of the supreme directorate at the house of one Oliver Bond."

"I know the man,—a pestilent traitor."

"The hour of the meeting is not yet fixed," Reynolds went on, "but I will give your lordship due notice."

"How come you to know this? What proof have we that you speak truly?"

"I am myself summoned to the meeting, my lord; here is my notice. As treasurer for the province of Leinster I am a member of the Leinster executive. I hold, moreover, the position of Colonel in the Revolutionary army."

Strange as it may seem, the man showed a kind of pride in his high position in the organization at the very moment he betrayed it.

"Colonel and treasurer of the rebels,— that's bad," said Clare.

"Colonel Reynolds will keep the rebel sword in its scabbard," said Cooke.

"And Treasurer Reynolds will, I have no doubt, keep the rebel money in his purse," laughed Clare; "and we will help him to some English gold to jingle there with it in due time."

"Understand me clearly, my lord," the spy broke in; "I will accept no reward."

"I understand you quite clearly, sir, I think," snarled the angry Lord Chancellor. "No reward, but you are open to compensation for your sacrifices. Now, if your losses are not our gains, we cannot be expected to undertake the compensation." Then, in a sharp, business-like tone, he asked: "Who are to be present at this rebels' gathering?"

Just for the fraction of a second the spy haggled at this consummation of the treason that was to make his name infamous for all time. Then he handed a second paper to Clare, who almost snatched it from his hand, and bending over the lamp read with savage eagerness, ticking off the names as he read, "Emmett, Sweetman, Jackson, Bond, himself and the rest. Here is a great covey of traitors," he cried, "if we can bag them all."

"They are all in the net, my lord," said Cooke. "We have but to pull the string; they cannot escape."

"Your friend here, Cooke," Lord Clare said maliciously, "will be prepared to give evidence, of course?"

Even the callous Cooke winced at that word "friend." But before he could answer Reynolds himself took the word. "My lord, my lord," he cried, in an agony of fear, "I dare not. My life would not be worth an hour's purchase."

"It seems to me of small commercial value at the present moment, sir," retorted Lord Clare angrily. "A self-confessed traitor who refuses to make friends with the Crown must take the consequences. Your pardon can only be purchased by——"

Here Cooke plucked his sleeve, and whispered in his ear very earnestly: "Patience, my lord; for God's sake, patience! You have the fish hooked fast, but you must be content to play him, or he may break away even yet. His evidence extracted by such threats would be worse than worthless to us; he would break down hopelessly under Curran's cross-examination. Besides, he will be much more valuable at present as an unsuspected spy. At any moment we have only to drop a hint to his kind friends, and his fears will place him wholly in our hands. Mr. Reynolds," he continued smoothly to the wretched spy, who stood shivering with terror, "my Lord Clare understands the honourable motives that forbid you to appear in the witness-box against your friends. He feels that you might be liable to misconstruction, and

perhaps annoyance. He is, therefore, satisfied to accept, with reasonable compensation of course, such private assistance as you can afford us. At the same time, he is sure that the zeal of which you have already given such conclusive proof will inspire you to further efforts."

"I will use the advantages of my position to the uttermost to gratify his lordship," said Reynolds, anticipating the suggestion which Cooke was half ashamed to put in plain words. "The friends of and the family of the prisoners will still confide in my friendship. His lordship need have no doubt."

"But I have my doubts, sir," said Lord Clare, "and very good reason for doubt, that you are playing us fast and loose. How comes it Lord Edward Fitzgerald is omitted from this list too? Is he not invited to the meeting?"

"Lord Edward Fitzgerald is my dearest friend and patron," faltered the spy, "a man from whom I have received innumerable favours."

"You will not, I am sure, allow personal considerations to obstruct your sacred duty to the State," said Cooke. "That duty is doubtless most painful to your feeling, but——"

"Your feelings will, of course, be considered in the amount of compensation," interrupted Lord Clare brusquely; "but Lord Edward Fitzgerald we must have. He is the most dangerous of all.

A thousand pounds will be handed to the man who helps us to him."

"My lord, it is too late," Reynolds urged nervously. "The truth is, I have written to Lord Edward that his presence would not be needed at the meeting—that I would represent him. I know he has no intention of being there."

"Write to him again, urging him to attend. You are not going yourself, I assume?"

"I thought it would be safer: more prudent not to attend."

"Write that to Lord Edward. Tell him you have changed your mind; find any excuse you like. Tell him his presence is essential. I tell you he must be there."

"If it is indeed essential for the country's safety I will do so," said Reynolds, "no matter how painful the duty to myself."

"Do so, do so; write without delay. Write to-morrow," cried Lord Clare. "You can still," he added contemptuously, "enjoy your friend's friendship—until he is hanged. After that the thousand pounds may help to console you."

"Good-bye, Mr. Reynolds, good-bye," cried Cooke noisily, drowning the concluding words of the sentence. "You have placed the Government under the deepest obligation." There was the musical tinkle of gold as he slipped a large green

silk purse into Reynolds' hands, "only for immediate expenses in the State's service," he urged, in reply to the other's feeble protest. "You must not be so sensitive, my dear sir, you really must not."

Lord Clare drew a deep sigh of relief, and seemed to shake a load from his shoulders as he walked back with Cooke across the cool, starlight Castle yard to join the brilliant gathering in the Viceregal drawing-room.

"A fellow like that sickens me," he said. "Lake, or Carhampton, or even that wild beast Judkin Fitzgerald, are decent in comparison. I can stand the butchers better than the brokers. But we must use such tools as we can find, clean or dirty, for the good work we have in hand."

Chapter III

THE WEARING OF THE GREEN

"When laws can stop the blades of grass from growing as they grow,
And when the leaves in summer time their verdure dare not show,
Then I will change the colour that I wear in my caubeen,
But till that day, please God, I'll stick to wearing of the green."

"IT'S now or never, Maurice," cried Lord Edward Fitzgerald impatiently, "the Government dread a rising."

"The Government want a rising," Maurice Blake answered quietly. "They are deliberately goading the country to revolt. I hope we may not play into their hands. Our people are not ready; unarmed, undrilled, they could make no stand against trained soldiers. Their rising would be a pretext for their massacre."

"They are being slaughtered without the pretext," Lord Edward retorted. "They are as ready now as they will ever be. There are a hundred thousand men enrolled in the North alone."

"They cannot fight without weapons."

"They WILL fight, believe me, to the death."

"Aye, to their own death. I believe that. But they won't conquer by being killed. I wish the French would come."

Lord Edward leaped up from his seat under the colonnade of Doric pillars that looked far out over the smiling pleasure grounds of Carton, the family seat of the Geraldines, and began pacing to and fro impatiently.

"I don't want the French," he said. "I'm sick of waiting for the French. This long expectancy is draining the manhood from our hearts. With poor Tone's failure our last hope of French help vanished. We must trust to the brave hearts and strong arms of our own people."

"But weapons?"

"We shall have pikes enough. There is no better weapon in the strong hand of a desperate man."

"I dread this rising, I dread it. It is an awful responsibility. The enemy is strong, and the enemy is merciless. It will be leading the people straight to massacre."

"Submission won't save them from massacre," Lord Edward replied. "Look there!"

A jagged column of black smoke, with a flush of lurid purple at its base, rose sluggishly through the still morning air and spread into an unsightly blotch on the clear blue sky.

"It is a blazing homestead," cried Lord Edward, "burned by the yeomen in sheer wanton devilry. There are a thousand such bonfires blazing in every corner of the country. I have heard a dozen times from where we stand, a good mile from Maynooth, the yells of the wretches who are flogged or picketted or half hanged or whole hanged at the mere whim of their torturers. If they must die let them at least die with weapons in their hands, mingling their persecutors' blood with their own. It is a just and holy war, and I, for one, have no fear for the event. I long for the hour when I shall draw my sword." In his excitement he raised this voice and clapped his hand upon his sword-hilt.

"Hush! hush!" cried Maurice Blake with a warning gesture. "They will hear; they will notice."

He glanced as he spoke over the broad pleasure ground that stretched in front of them. Peace and beauty wholly possessed the scene. Away in the distance great masses of forest foliage broke and fell away down a steep declivity where the river, widening to a lake, lay at large in the green vale like a patch of blue sky fallen from the heavens. Close at hand the sward was vivid green velvet, fenced with pillars of sombre yew and starred with flower beds. A quaint dial

numbered the sunshiny hours, and a fountain flashed and splashed round a figure of winged Mercury, poised in act of flight.

Closer still, gathered round the famous stone council table of the Geraldines, was the group to which the men's eyes turned. The spring roses grew and clustered round the four square legs and the curved central support, and pushed their unopened buds over the edge of the table. Here and there the traceries and bas-reliefs of the pale grey limestone showed close-grained and clear cut as marble through the sheltering green leaves.

The taller of the two ladies had lifted a little girl on to the smooth surface of the table, where she sat contentedly playing with a double handful of wild flowers and making the morning air joyous with baby laughter. Two other children—a boy and girl—tugged at their mother's skirts with wistful eyes turned to the fountain where the gold-fish played. Bright sun never gazed on, or blue sky framed, a fairer picture of rest and happiness.

But in an instant the change came. Blake's warning was too late.

Pamela's quick eye and ear caught the angry note in her husband's voice, saw the fierce motion of his hand to his sword-hilt.

She came to him quickly, frightened and flutter-

ing with vague fear. Norah Blake, having caught the baby from its perch, followed more slowly.

The light died out of Lord Edward's face as Pamela came, and he stood before his sweet-faced child wife in guilty silence. The young wife panted a little with her hand on her side, and drew her breath thrice quickly before she spoke, not sorry her lord's eye should note how frail she was.

"You must not frighten me, Edward," she said at last, with a touch of a quaint foreign accent in her sweet low voice. "When you cried out and gripped your sword just now, I almost swooned with fear. Feel how my heart beats."

His arm stole round her waist, and she nestled close to his side with tearful entreaty in her dark eyes.

"I am often frightened lately," she whispered; "this fear is wearing my life away. Though it is so lovely and peaceful here, yet there seems to be treachery and murder in the air. Let us go away from this," she murmured, nestling closer and closer, "away to some quiet country, where we can again be happy together as in the dear old days. For my sake, for the little ones' sake, you won't refuse?"

For a moment the husband and the father half conquered the patriot in Lord Edward's heart, as he gazed into the soft lustrous eyes fixed

entreatingly on his own. Flight and happiness were so easy and so near. But it was only for a moment.

"You don't know, Pam," he whispered; "you cannot understand. My place is here."

"I can understand that you are in daily peril of your life," she answered piteously, with overflowing tears; "I fear for you, Edward, with a fear that will be my death."

Lord Edward patted her soft cheek gently with his finger tips, and whispered words of comfort in her ear as one might comfort a troubled child. But she grew more piteous from his comforting.

Norah Blake, gazing into her husband's eyes with a deeper and a calmer love, read his thoughts.

"Come away, Pamela," she said softly, with quick appeal to the mother's instinct, "the little ones are hungry. Besides, you know you must not fret for anything just now, lest——"

The sentence finished itself in Pamela's ear; and the two women moved away together, Pamela moving languidly and leaning on her friend's arm, the little ones racing in front.

There were tears in Lord Edward's eyes as he turned from watching them disappear into the house.

"This is the hardest wrench of all, Maurice," he said, "for you and me. But we have men's work to do, which women may not hinder. By mid-day I am due in Dublin, at the meeting of the Executive at Oliver Bond's."

"I thought you were not needed there?"

"So I thought myself until this morning. So Reynolds wrote me a week ago. But this morning I had a second letter from him post haste, urging me to attend. The question of an immediate rising will be raised; my vote may decide it."

"His own view is?"

"Oh, he is in favour of prompt and vigorous action. He always has been. If every man were as forward and as faithful as Reynolds, we need have no fear for the movement."

"When do you start?"

"Now at once. I must be in good time. The horses are at the front door. I wish you would ride a little way with me. I want to hear more of your mission to the West."

"I will ride with you to Dublin."

"Let us get away quietly then, without leave-taking. Pam's tears always draw the manhood out of my heart."

His indomitable spirit came back to him as they cantered with loose rein along the grassy margin of the broad road that led from Maynooth

to Dublin, the fresh morning breeze blowing coolly in their faces.

He was full of hope and ardour. "A successful rising in Dublin," he said, "will paralyse the Castle gang. North, South, East and West the country will catch the flame. The people's first fierce rush will carry all before it. Discipline will be taught by victory. It was so with the raw recruits of the French Republic. It will be so with ours. I tell you, Maurice, I have no fear if I can once bring our men face to face with the enemy in the field. They have suffered wrongs to make cowards brave, and they are no cowards. Death will have no terror for them comparable with defeat. It is the desperate men that win battles. The enemy are demoralized by a long course of wanton, unresisted savagery. The bully in the barracks is always a coward in the field. We shall win. I feel it; I know it. The assurance of victory is throbbing through my blood. Listen!"

He proceeded to unfold his plan of the rising in detail. In an instant the young hot-blooded soldier became the cool and cautious, far-seeing general. His plans were laid with consummate skill; nothing was left to chance. His own strength and the enemy's were reckoned up with the minutest care. Every contingency of the

coming campaign was foreseen and provided for.

As Blake listened, his hopes revived. His wonder and his admiration for the military genius, the marvellous precision of his friend, who, in lighter moments, seemed an impulsive schoolboy, deepened at every word.

"With such a cause and such men to back it, we cannot be beaten," cried Lord Edward.

"With you to lead us, we shall win," Blake answered heartily. "But remember, Edward, you are our only general. Without you it is a headless movement. Let that thought teach you——"

"Courage?" he asked, smiling.

"No, that's a lesson you learn only too readily. Caution."

"I will be as cautious as a rabbit at the mouth of its burrow," cried Lord Edward laughingly.

But the laughter ceased abruptly, and his brow knit and his eyes lightened in sudden anger.

"Look! Maurice, look!" he cried with pointing hand. "The devil take their insolence!"

From the shelter of the hedgerow on either side, two horsemen, in flaming scarlet uniform, with swords drawn, sprung out and blocked the road in front of them.

Lord Edward's boasted caution evaporated in a moment at the prospect of a fight. His hand sought his sword-hilt and rested there.

"We'll teach those fellows," he whispered, "that they have not poor unarmed peasants to deal with now."

"Halt!" cried the foremost of the two opposing horsemen, as Lord Edward and his companion, with tightened rein, cautiously advanced.

He was squat and swarthy, with fierce black eyes, and black hair and beard, just touched with white. His companion, taller and slighter, had the quick alert bearing of a serviceable soldier.

The insolent command sent the blood flaming to Lord Edward's cheek, and his hand gripped his sword-hilt hard. But before he could reply, the pompous voice rang out again.

"Fellow," he cried, pointing with a menacing hand at Lord Edward's green scarf, "how dare you wear the rebel colours on the king's highway?"

"Because I choose."

"That is no answer."

"You will get no other from me."

"Don't bandy words with me. Remove it instantly, I say."

Lord Edward had cooled down from the first quick flush of anger. But there was a deadlier menace in the quiet courtesy of manner, if the other had but the wit to know it.

"If the colour offends you, sir," he said gently, "perhaps you will take the trouble to remove it."

Encouraged by the gentle voice, the dark-faced man put spurs to his horse. But his companion laid a restraining hand on his rein.

"Be cautious, my lord," he whispered, "it is the young dare-devil, Lord Edward Fitzgerald."

"If he were twenty times a lord," the other answered fiercely,—but he glanced back over his shoulder as he spoke,—"he shall smart at the flogging-post for this insolence."

Meanwhile, Lord Edward and Blake still quietly advanced.

"Surrender, sir!" cried the dark-faced officer again; "you are known, and you cannot escape. Our men are close at hand."

He flourished his sword bravely, but there was a quaver in his voice, and his horse stumbled back a pace or two from the tightening rein.

"As you will not come for that scarf," Lord Edward answered mockingly, "I must fetch it to you, I suppose."

Again the officer glanced sharply over his shoulder. But his men, whom he had outridden, had started off on a marauding expedition of their own, and the long straight road behind him stretched white and bare.

"I will hold no further parley with a rebel," he answered, with a poor attempt at dignity. "But be sure, my lord, you will answer for this conduct at the proper place and time."

"There is no place or time, more proper than here and now," Lord Edward cried; "and I am ready with my answer if you are ready with your questioning."

He whipped his sword from its scabbard like a streak of white light, and put spurs to his horse's side.

His opponent wrenched round his horse's head as quickly. But Blake, who had quietly edged past, faced him with drawn sword on the other side.

The taller man rode straight at Blake with uplifted sword, shouting to his comrade. Half a dozen quick cuts and passes, and Blake's sword edge slashed him across the knuckles and his weapon dropped clanging from his maimed hand and lay shining in the dust of the road. At the same moment his horse reared, and shot him headlong into the ditch.

Meanwhile, Lord Edward's challenger sat stock still in his saddle, waiting the onset.

"Have a care," he cried, as their swords clashed; "this is rank treason and rebellion. I wear the uniform of the king."

"Aye and disgrace it," Lord Edward answered contemptuously. "Defend yourself."

The sunlight flashed and shivered on the sword blades as they struck and parried with lightning speed. Quick and dexterous, the strong squat man was no foe to be despised. With a wrench of the reins and a plunge of the spurs he wheeled his horse suddenly to one side, and dealt a quick downright cut at his opponent's head as he passed. Swerving, Lord Edward escaped the stroke by a hair's breadth. The sword shore the empty air, and Lord Edward's blade swiftly following, struck it from the enemy's loosening grasp. Instantly his own sword point dropped. But in that instant the other drew a pistol from his holster and fired point blank at his head. He heard the bullet sing, and felt its wind upon his cheek, so close it came. Then deadly anger mastered him. His left hand gripped the rein of his opponent's horse, his right pressed the shortened sword against his breast so hard it pierced the uniform and pricked the skin.

"Dismount!" he shouted fiercely, and the cowed bully scrambled from his saddle.

"Now, down on your knees before the Irish colours you have insulted!"

The other opened his lips, as if to frame some protest.

"On your knees!" repeated Lord Edward sternly; and he sank on his knees in the thick dust of the road.

"So fare all foes of Ireland," said the young patriot scornfully, as he slipped his sword back unblooded into the scabbard.

"Have you slain your man, Maurice?" he added, with a glance at the riderless horse scampering down the road.

"Oh no; a cut on the fingers, and a roll in the ditch, that's all."

"Let us leave them to comfort each other. Our business presses, and more than enough of precious time has been wasted."

Glancing back over his shoulder as he rode, Blake saw his opponent creep out of the ditch to his comrade, who still knelt in the middle of the road.

"Has the rebel hurt you much, my lord?" the man asked obsequiously.

"Nothing of the kind," the other blustered, when a quick glance over his shoulder showed him the foe fifty yards away. "We fought on foot. That Lord Edward of yours is a poor swordsman, and a poltroon to boot. One pass more and I should have pinked him; but I overreached myself in a lunge, and before I could regain my feet the coward fled."

"Lucky for him, my lord," said the other as he

wrapped his bleeding fingers in his handkerchief, while a queer grimace twisted his lips, it might be with pain.

"But where are our fellows, Buckley?" his lordship added anxiously. "It's not the first or second time they have strayed."

"Yonder, and hard at work I dare swear," Buckley answered, pointing to where a farmhouse a mile or so away burst suddenly into smoke and flame. "They are full of zeal."

"Zeal is all very well in its way, Buckley," his lordship retorted sharply, "but discipline must be preserved and officers supported. This encounter might easily have chanced badly for ——"

"The rebels, my lord," the other interposed quietly, "if your lordship had not so unfortunately slipped."

His lordship turned on him a sharp glance of suspicion, but his face wore a look of innocent admiration. Without another word they recaptured their steeds, trotted off in the direction of the burning homestead, where shrieks of pain and yells of triumph could now be distinctly heard above the roaring of the flame.

"Did you know that man, Edward?" Blake asked, as they pushed forward briskly on the road to Dublin.

"What man?"

"The man whom you put to his prayers, the first for many years, I should think. That was Lord Carhampton."

"Carhampton! Satinadas!" Lord Edward cried excitedly. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. I know him well. He was a fierce admirer of my wife once upon a time. He persecuted her with his attentions; she told me so after our marriage, and bound me over to the peace."

"Carhampton!" Lord Edward repeated more fiercely than before. "The wanton torturer of women and children. If I knew it was he I would have split his skull with my sword as he knelt before me on the road. Even now I have a great mind to——"

He would have turned again, but Blake stretched a restraining hand.

"There is no time now for such amusements," he said, smiling.

"You are right; you are right," Lord Edward answered. "I fear we shall be late as it is." He drew his watch by the ribbon from its fob. "Ride as we may we shall at least be half an hour behind time. But the meeting will be a long one, and what I have got to say to it will come best at the close."

They gave their horses their heads and pushed briskly along a deserted road, with deserted homesteads on either hand. Now and again, at the clatter of the horses' hoofs, a frightened face peered for an instant from the hedgerow, or over the blackened wall of a ruined cottage. There was no other sign of life in all that wide fair landscape steeped in sunshine. For deadly terror was abroad, and in this wanton one-sided war no man, woman, or child was safe from torture or death.

Chapter IV

ON A HOT SCENT

"And treachery preys on the blood of the best."

RIDE as they might in hot haste, old Time went faster. As Lord Edward prophesied, they were a good half-hour behind time when they came cantering through the Park Gate into Dublin.

There was a strange suppressed excitement abroad in the city,—a disquieting atmosphere of unrest. Men gathered in groups at every corner, and fear or anger was on every face. Small parties of soldiers in brilliant uniforms swaggered through the streets, ripe for mischief. Women and children fled homewards, or gazed with frightened faces through the chinks of shuttered windows. It was the dread expectancy that was the prelude to the storm.

A vague fear struck chill through the hearts of Lord Edward and Blake. But they pressed forward without interchanging a word. At the further corner of the long street where Bond's house stood

they drew rein so suddenly, that the sliding iron on the horses' hoofs struck sparks from the flinty pavement.

Round Bond's house a great crowd was gathered; not shouting or groaning, but in the dead hush of a more intense excitement. In the very heart of the sombre crowd was a broad patch of bright scarlet, resplendent in the sunshine, where a troop of soldiers guarded the door.

The street sloped down sharply to the house, and standing high in their stirrups, Lord Edward and Blake, a hundred yards away, could see all that passed as from the upper tier of a theatre.

Even as they looked the close-packed crowd swayed violently as water sways when a sudden gust of wind comes upon it.

The front door opened, and two men came out with a third between them; a well set up figure, neatly, though plainly, dressed. The captive walked between his captors like their master. There was no trace of fear in the resolute eyes, or on the calm, kindly face. But his hands, hanging limp in front with iron at the wrists, told their own tale.

They knew him at a glance. "My God! it is Oliver Bond himself!" Lord Edward gasped out.

"The meeting has been surprised," Blake whispered back. "There have been traitors at work in our midst. Look there!"

Again the crowd quivered; the door opened again; and one after another they saw their trusty colleagues led forth in handcuff, till they counted twelve in the centre of the soldiery, who kept back the crowd with a prickly row of fixed bayonets and muskets primed and loaded.

Lord Edward was quivering all over with excitement, like a hound in the leash. Suddenly his self-control snapped under the strain. With teeth set tight, he drew his sword, rested the naked point on his boot, and put spurs to his horse.

But at the same instant Blake's strong hand was on his rein. Wrenching the horse's head round by sheer force, he wheeled him back by the corner of the street that shut them out from the gaze of the crowd and the soldiery.

"Let go!" Lord Edward cried, while his horse plunging with excitement tugged at the rein. "The crowd only lack a leader. To the rescue! I'll save them yet."

"Your coming will be the signal for their slaughter," Blake answered. "The soldiers are only waiting for the chance to use their weapons on their prisoners."

"I can die with them, at least."

"Cold comfort that for those who trust you, my lord," Blake sternly retorted. "Remember," he went on, with passionate entreaty in his voice, "you

are now, more than ever, the hope of the movement and of the nation. Your life is not your own to risk or lose in desperate adventure."

For answer, Lord Edward flung his reins on the horse's neck, and slipped his sword back into its scabbard.

"Where shall we hide ourselves now?" he asked bitterly, still sore at the thought of his friends, captured without a blow struck in their defence; "Leinster House, I suppose, is safest."

"No, no," Blake answered, ignoring the petulance of his tone. "If there were treachery here it was meant for you as well as for the rest; for you more than for the rest. You must show yourself no more till you can show yourself in arms at the head of armed men. Leinster House is sure to be watched and searched. But my house in Jervis Street is quite unknown, and Christy Culkin is a trusty door-keeper."

With the drawing of bolts and the clanging of falling chains, the door of Blake's house in Jervis Street opened to their knocking four or five inches only, and through the chink they could see the glint of eyes in the darkness.

One glimpse, however, at his master's face, and Christy Culkin let the heavy chain slide off noiselessly, and stepped out to welcome them.

His shrewd eyes read bad news in their faces.

Silent, stolid, imperturbable as ever, he took their horses without a word.

"Any one in the house?" Blake asked.

"No one but Peggy," Christy answered over his shoulders as he led the horses away.

Blake led the way into the room where he had once lain so long insensible while Dr. Denver had fought death for him at close quarters. Poor Dr. Denver had himself yielded to the grim foe from whom he had in his day rescued so many victims, and so the house had come to his daughter's husband.

"I think you will be safe here," Blake said anxiously, as he slipped out into the hall to close and bar the door. "The house has been shut up since the poor doctor's death, a year ago, with Christy and Peggy as caretakers."

"Peggy," he called softly, and in a moment Peggy Culkin's buxom figure and pretty face, radiating good humour, appeared at the door of the parlour. She curtesied demurely without speaking.

"Any one here for the last week?" Blake asked.

"One gentleman; a quiet, civil-spoken, friendly gentleman he was too. He wanted to see his lordship, and asked when he was expected. He said he was a great friend of his. Mr. Reynolds was the name."

"Reynolds!" broke from Blake. "Reynolds! How, in God's name, did he know of this place?"

"I told him, of course," Lord Edward interposed. "He wanted to know where I was likely to be found if I were wanted in any sudden emergency, and I told him Leinster House, Carton, or here. Why, Maurice," he interrupted himself as he caught sight of his friend's face, "this is too absurd. You might as well suspect me of treachery as Reynolds; he is true as my right hand to my shoulder."

"I hope so," Blake answered slowly, "I sincerely hope so; but remember amongst those we trust there is assuredly one traitor. Why not Reynolds?"

"Reynolds? Absurd."

"As like as another. I did not see him amongst the prisoners just now."

"Nor I," cried Lord Edward gleefully. "I pray God he has escaped. We have no more serviceable or honourable man in the movement. I would stake my life on his honour."

"I hope you may not stake and lose."

"I'll take my chance," Lord Edward answered warmly. "I know the man and you don't; that's all. But we must not quarrel over Reynolds, Maurice. Time will show who is right. Meanwhile we have our hands full. This arrest is a perilous blow."

"The treachery it shows is more perilous still."

"We must not think of that. We must not let suspicion of our friends paralyse our souls. We must set to work at once to repair the breach that has been made. Prompt action is more than ever needed now, and resolute men for our new directory."

"The brothers Sheares for example?"

"The very men; brave and capable and true. I will see them to-morrow. But first we must go to Carton."

"To Carton?"

"Of course, Pamela and Norah will be frightened to death when they hear of this arrest; and you know poor Pam is——"

"I know, I know; but that would be a strange way, indeed, to ease her mind. If you go, you will be arrested before you are half a mile on your way to Carton. You have had your warning; you must not stir out of doors undisguised for the future."

"But Pamela and Norah?"

"I will go myself to fetch them."

"No, no," replied Lord Edward, prudent where others but himself were concerned. "You must keep clear of suspicion for the work you have to do: Christy is the man. He will pass anywhere for a stark Orangeman, and he is as trusty as—Reynolds."

"So be it," Blake answered, without noticing the challenge in the last word.

"If he starts at once, they may be back here before midnight."

"Not here surely?"

"Why not? If it is safe for me, it is safe for Pamela."

"Her coming would set Major Sirr and his bloodhounds on your track. For her sake, Edward"—for Lord Edward made an impatient gesture—"you must not do this thing. Your arrest would kill her now. Let Pamela go to Leinster House with the children. Norah can come here."

"And your youngster, Val?"

"He can come here too. He will be useful as a disguise in diverting suspicion."

"You always have your own way, Maurice. Have it now. Get Christy to horse then as soon as may be."

As Blake slipped out into the hall, there came a gentle tap at the street door. He opened it himself, and saw Thomas Reynolds on the steps.

The hall was dark, and Blake stood in the shadow of the door, so that the visitor in the light could not see his face.

"Lord Edward?" he asked, in a smooth, soft voice.

"No, his friend," Blake answered curtly; "come in. You are Mr. Reynolds, I think?"

"You have guessed rightly," Reynolds answered, trying vainly to get a glimpse of the other's face. "I have just heard of the arrests. Lord Edward has escaped? Oh! tell me, for God's sake! that he has escaped."

Then Lord Edward, hearing the voices, himself stepped out into the hall with outstretched hand to greet his friend.

"Yes, I have escaped, Reynolds, as you see," he said heartily. "It was a close thing, but I was delayed on the road, and slipped through their toils. It is good of you to come so soon. How did this blow fall? Who was the traitor?"

"I know no more than you do. There is a whisper abroad about Nelson. But it is too horrible a suspicion to fasten on any man without clear proof."

"Still, the meeting must have been betrayed by some one. Were you there?"

"No. My wife took suddenly ill, and so I too, like yourself, was delayed. Nelson, who was guarding the door, escaped and told me how the thing happened. Thirteen police sergeants in plain clothes gave the pass word,—'Where's Macan? Is Ivers from Carlow come?'—and so passed without suspicion into the meeting. I was

in terror lest you, my lord, had been captured with the rest, especially as I urged you to attend. Lady Fitzgerald is not with you here?"

"No. She is in Carton. We are sending for her. Come in. I have much to learn and tell. You will dine with us, of course?"

"I cannot. I am full of urgent business, and my wife is still ailing. But I will come to you again to-morrow."

Lord Edward showed his friend into the lighted and comfortable parlour. But Maurice Blake did not follow. He passed through the kitchen to the yard, and had a few whispered words first with Peggy.

The impatient pawing of horses' hoofs on the pavement cut Lord Edward short in the midst of an animated description of his plans.

"Forgive me for a moment, Reynolds," he said; "I want to write one line to my wife."

He passed into the study as he spoke, and the next moment Reynolds slipped out, stealthily as a cat, into the hall, and listened with strained ears.

Blake was giving his final directions to Christy, and he spoke so loudly, that even in the parlour he might have been distinctly heard.

"You will bring the ladies straight here," he said. "With brisk riding you should arrive

before midnight." Then, in a whisper so low, that even Reynolds' strained ears failed to catch the faintest sound, "Remember, I will meet you without fail, at the Park Gate at Chapelizod. On no account come on till you have seen me."

Reynolds was back again, and seated quietly in the parlour before Lord Edward came through with a note, which he gave to Christy at the door. "For Lady Edward's own hands," he said. "Tell her that——" But the clatter of the horse's hoofs on the pavement drowned the last words, as Christy rode off at a hand gallop.

For nearly an hour Reynolds lingered on with Lord Edward, and they lunched together in friendly fashion in Blake's absence.

Two minutes however after Reynolds' departure, Blake let himself in at the front door with a latch-key.

"Where were you?" Lord Edward cried, when he showed at the parlour door. "We missed you badly. Reynolds has been holding forth at a great rate. He is in touch with every detail of the movement, and he is full of courage and confidence. What became of you?"

"I was out on the prowl; spy-stalking."

"I am sorry. It would have done you good to have heard Reynolds talk."

"I hardly think so."

"Oh! we will see. He is coming again to-morrow. He will quickly make a convert of you."

"I'm afraid he will have his errand for his pains. We must leave here to-night."

"To-night! Why, you yourself said we were quite safe here."

"I have had reason to change my mind."

"You are as vague as an oracle. Speak out. What is it you fear?"

"I have learned that you are to be arrested at midnight here."

"Some foolish rumour, Maurice."

"I would stake my existence on its truth. I know it; I tell you I know it."

"But how? how? Speak out plainly, man. I don't like groping in the dark."

"I cannot tell. It is not my secret. I want you to take my bare word for it, Edward. I can give no proof."

"Of course, I'll take your word, if you put it that way. I hate mysteries, as you know, but I'll take your word for more than that."

"Thanks," Blake answered, gripping his hand heartily. "I trust to clear this mystery before long. Then you'll thank me. Meanwhile, I must evict you forthwith."

"But Pamela and Norah? They are coming straight here. I heard you give Christy the

direction myself. I confess it surprised me. Reynolds and I spoke of it afterwards."

"I will ride to the Park Gate to meet and warn them. There will be plenty of time after I have seen you safe."

Lord Edward was answered, but not satisfied. He was longing for a glimpse at Pamela. Perhaps some instinct told him that they were soon to part for ever.

"May I not ride with you?" he asked pleadingly.

But Blake shook his head. "It would be sheer madness; for Pamela's own sake not to be thought of. The bloodhounds are already hot on your scent. There is danger enough, and more than enough, to be faced between this and Portobello, where I have secured a shelter for you with our good friend Mrs. Dillon."

"Let us start at once then."

"Steady: you must have a disguise; but then how to get it at such short notice, I——"

There was a knock at the door, and Peggy entered with meat and wine on a tray.

"Well thought of," said Lord Edward; "you have had no food since morning, Maurice, and you have a long ride before you."

But Blake turned quickly to Peggy; a sudden thought had struck him.

"Has Christy any clothes in the house?" he asked.

The colour heightened in her cheeks at the abrupt question.

"Sorra' one stitch then," she said, "but them that's with him riding to Carton." Then all at once her quick wit told her what the clothes were wanting for, and the blush deepened to scarlet and she fingered her apron hem nervously with a twinkle, half-shy, half-sly, in her downcast eyes.

"But sure," she began, and stopped.

"But what, Peggy?"

"I could let down one of my own gowns in a jiffy, and sorra' wan would ever think of looking for his lordship inside of it."

"Bravo, Peggy!" Lord Edward cried. "That will set the spies—if spies there be—completely off the track. Take the tucks out as soon as you can, and I'm ready to try on."

"In ten minutes I'll be ready for your lordship," Peggy answered; "and I'll leave the gown and, and:——the other things in the bedroom."

Blake had barely finished a hasty meal, when Lord Edward came back into the room. For a moment he was mystified, so perfect was the transformation. The gallant young soldier was converted into a strapping young country girl.

Peggy's deft fingers had pinned, and looped, and buttoned the dark brown "lindsey-woolsey" gown into shape. It was looped up at the skirts, showing a scarlet petticoat. A gay plaid shawl of many colours was folded modestly over the breast, softening the square outline of the shoulders. A smaller shawl on his head showed just the margin of smooth dark hair, evenly parted in the middle of his forehead.

"Don't I make a purty colleen?" Lord Edward asked gaily, dropping him a rustic curtsey.

"Your lordship is a rale credit to the petticoats," Peggy cried delightedly. "If the yeomen—bad luck to them—catch a pep, they will be after you faster than ever."

Lord Edward laughed out joyously at this notion, but Blake was perturbed.

"You are too good-looking, Edward," he said, smiling in spite of himself; "that's the devil of it. Peggy is right: you will have half the soldiers in the town after you, and they'll find the rebel fast enough in their quest for a sweetheart."

But Peggy ran to her room, and was back again in a moment with one of those great cloaks, of fine dark blue cloth, which is the distinctive robe of the matron in the west of Ireland.

"That's what'll make an old woman of your

lordship in no time," she said, as she fastened the heavy metal clasps at his throat, and drew the hood well over his head.

"It's your own, Peggy; do you wear it?" Maurice asked. "You know his lordship is Peggy Culkin for the present."

"It's my own, your honour, ever since I was Peggy Culkin. In our part of the country it comes to the married woman as regular as the ring, and I never put a foot outside the door without it."

"You know Portobello, Edward?" Blake asked.

"I think I may truly say I know every inch of Dublin. In a month's time I hope to hold every inch of it. Yes, I know Portobello and I know Mrs. Dillon, but I'm afraid I don't know the house."

"It's on the canal on the right hand side as you cross the bridge—the seventh house, I think. But we must make sure. A mistake would be rather awkward. I will meet you by accident on the bridge, and show you the house."

Lord Edward, in whose mind danger ended when action began, was impatient to be off. But Blake insisted on going first. "I'm not the game they hunt at present," he said, "they will let me pass free." So it proved. At the street corner a man ran against him accidentally and apologised,

looking straight into his face. Then he went on his way unmolested.

Now it was Lord Edward's turn. He slipped a market basket over his arm, with a pair of pistols loaded and primed, for merchandize, loosened his sword in its scabbard strapped tight to his side, lest it should clank under his cloak, and sallied boldly out into the dangerous streets.

Unnoticed, the tall comely woman passed through the thronged thoroughfares, thronged with enemies and friends—with United Irishmen ready to die for his sake, and Orangemen who would give their souls—such as they were—to slay him.

At the bridge the young woman was almost ran against by a tall, military-looking man, walking rapidly in the same direction. He apologised hastily, passed on, and turned to the right down the canal road. Just opposite a handsome detached building, the gentleman dropped his glove, picked it up, and went on round a corner at the end of the road. Two minutes later Lord Edward was safe under the hospitable roof of Mrs. Dillon.

Blake did not return to Jervis Street. He got a horse at a livery stable, and as the dusk began to close in on the city, set out leisurely to keep his appointment with Christy at Chapelizod.

Chapter V

THE BAFFLED BLOODHOUNDS

"'Twixt the traitor and the maid
Warily the game was played ;
On the issue of their strife
There was staked a hero's life.
Not less eager either way,
She to save and he to slay,
O'er traitor's wile her woman's wit
Triumphed finely as was fit ;
In the snare himself had laid
Caught the caitiff self-betrayed."

WITH the dusk a dull grey clamminess, half mist, half rain, settled down on the comfortless city, blurring the outlines of the houses and the passers-by. Stealthy figures coming and going loomed through the mist and disappeared round that deserted house in Jervis Street, or loitered in the dark, damp void of an open archway across the road, from whose recesses might be heard the muttering of hoarse voices, and now and again the clink of steel.

Gradually the throng in the street thinned away and disappeared, and the croaking of those night-

birds encased in the deep archway sounded more audible in the still air. Slowly the leaden hours went by, and the grumbling voices grew louder as they passed.

A slow, deep-toned bell began to boom out the midnight. Before it had done a score of neighbouring steeples joined in the discordant chorus, and the night air palpitated with the irritating sound.

"Curse it!" growled Major Sirr to the companion who cowered beside him at the archway's mouth, with a file of soldiers packed behind them; "curse it everlastingly! Another cover drawn blank. We have had a d——n long wait in this overground coal cellar for our pains. Midnight you said at latest, and you were cock-sure of your information."

"I had reason to be," Reynolds answered snarlingly; "I had it at first hand."

"First or second hand, it is a misfit!" answered Sirr, with a sound between a chuckle and a growl. "Your fine plan for bagging the whole batch of rebels in the open has broken down. There will be no lady visitors to-night; you may take your oath. We must dig the fox out."

"What do you mean by that?" Reynolds asked sharply, yet with a catch in his voice.

"What do I mean! If the d——d young rebel was there this morning, as you swear he was, he's

there still. No one has left the house since, I'll swear, except that fellow Blake—I think you call him—whom you yourself told us to let pass."

"And the country girl, major," a sergeant close behind ventured to interpose; "and a d——n fine, strapping wench she was too. By God, I wish——"

"D——n you and the country wench, Hennessy!" growled Major Sirr savagely. "Who asked you to put your word in? A hempen cravat is the only sure cure for pimping ears and babbling tongue, and by George I'll try it if I catch you at those parrot tricks again."

"We have men enough to drag the rebel out by the heels," he went on, addressing Reynolds, while the sergeant shrank back abashed, "and the sooner the better."

"You shall do nothing of the kind," Reynolds answered curtly.

"What then?"

"Get quietly away."

"And leave the rebel safe behind?"

"Precisely."

"I'd see you and him d——d first."

"Listen to reason, my dear major," quavered Reynolds, subdued by his ferocity. "Nobody knows Lord Edward is in this house except myself."

"Lord Clare knows it, and I know it; that's quite enough for my purpose."

"But not for mine. Lord Edward and his friends believe that I alone know their secret. They must continue to believe it."

"You should have thought of that before you betrayed them," said Sirr, with the coarse contempt of the bully for the spy.

"If the ladies had led you, or seemed to lead you to his hiding-place," Reynolds went on unmoved, "it would be safe for me. But if you now break into the house, I will inevitably be suspected, and suspicion means death."

"That's your affair, not mine. If the women are not here in five minutes, I'll have the door down and the house searched. I delayed so long only to give your precious plan fair play. I never liked it."

"You dare not do it," cried Reynolds, made bold by his fear.

"Who'll stop me?"

"I will."

"You!" growled Sirr, the more insolently as the other quailed before him, "a cur like you, that has not the pluck even to be a rebel?"

"Remember," Reynolds answered, "Lord Clare put you and your men under my command. You must answer to him."

That shot told. Sirr quailed in his turn at the name of the arrogant, unscrupulous, omnipotent Lord Chancellor.

"What's your plan, then," he demanded surlily.

"I have promised to call on Lord Edward in the morning. I'll keep my promise, though I did not mean to do so when I made it. On one pretence or another I will lure him into a quiet street, where you can arrest us both. If I draw and strike in his defence, suspicion will be sent wandering off in the wrong track."

"Aye! and a flesh wound or so would help you to keep up the joke," said Sirr with a malicious grin; "I think I can answer for that item in the programme. My fellows are most accommodating."

"You must answer to Lord Clare for your obedience to my orders," retorted Reynolds, and again the mention of the master's name subdued the underling.

"Good-night," said Reynolds, after a pause, "I am going to have a few hours' sleep at my hotel."

"Has your honour any further orders before you go?" Sirr asked sarcastically.

"Well, yes," answered Reynolds, who was now in the street beyond the archway; "you and your

fellows will continue to guard the house and arrest any one that leaves it; you can make no mistake in that, as Lord Edward himself is the only one left. Good-night again, my friend, and keep good watch, as you shall answer to my Lord Clare. You will find it a little dull out here, I am afraid; but duty, you know, above all things."

Sirr handled the butt of his pistol longingly as the figure melted away into the murky night, but he kept his finger from the tempting trigger.

When Mr. Reynolds knocked next morning at the house in Jervis Street, the city was silent in the sunshine of a roseate dawn. Not a trace of a soldier; not so much as the point of a bayonet or the butt of a pistol was anywhere in sight.

Peggy, blithe and buxom, opened the door promptly to his knock, and dropped him a little welcoming curtsey.

Reynolds was startled. He had made sure she had gone out the previous evening, and had not returned. Their watch must have been slackly kept, after all.

"Lord Edward at home?" he asked, in a confidential undertone, with a world of anxious caution in his voice.

"No, sir," Peggy answered sweetly; "he is gone."

"Gone!" cried Reynolds, for an instant off his

guard with disappointment. "That cannot be, my girl. No one left the house since I saw him except——"

He stammered and stopped confused. Just one sharp, unnoticed glance Peggy gave him from her quick blue eyes. Instantly she was smiling, sweetly unconscious as before.

"He left last evening, your honour. Troth, he just put on a skirt and dress of my own and out with him into the street like a play-actor. It was a quare sort of thing to do, now, wasn't it? I'm thinking it's some kind of bad work he's up to. I don't like those goings on at all, at all."

"Where has he gone to?" Reynolds asked, striving hard to suppress his eagerness.

"To tell you no lie, I don't know that same at the present moment. But maybe, if it was worth my while, I could find out."

"I'll make it worth your while," he said, catching at her meaning. "I'll be passing about this hour to-morrow. Just put that flower vase in the window if Lord Edward is in, and that other if you have news of him."

To his surprise she broke out in quick suspicion and anger.

"I'll have neither hand, act, nor part in the like," she protested hotly. "How do I know what devilment you two's up to; treason, rebellion, or the

like of that, and ye wouldn't in the laste taste mind bringing a poor girl into trouble."

Reynolds, with a furtive smile, quietly closed the door of the parlour, and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"You have no sympathy with the rebels, then, my dear?" he said.

"Sympathy?" she asked, with a blank look.

"I mean that you are not on the side of the rebels?"

"The rebels, indeed! That's a likely story, and my own boy a sergeant in the Yeos. There, I've let it out now, bad scran to it, and maybe it's black rebel you are yourself, and you'll be telling his lordship on me and getting me put from the place."

Reynolds looked at her very earnestly. Then he walked to the door, opened it and looked out, closed it again and locked it.

"There's no one in the house?" he said to Peggy, who looked on open-eyed.

"Sorra soul only ourselves. Your honour won't tell on me?" very anxiously.

"Have no fear, my good girl," Reynolds answered soothingly. "Now sit down here and listen to what I have got to tell you. You hate the rebels, you say?"

"And haven't I good cause for that same? Didn't

one of them shoot a small taste iv the ear off me own boy?"

"Well, Lord Edward is chief of the rebels."

"Troth, I guessed as much myself."

"There would be peace and quietness in the country if he were taken."

"No more fighting or divilment going on?"

"Quite so; and promotion for a certain sergeant."

Peggy's face beamed for a moment, then clouded with sudden suspicion.

"But you're a friend of Lord Edward's?" she objected, looking him full in the face.

"Not quite that," he stammered. "That is to say, I am still greater friend of law and order, which his lordship is attempting to destroy. I want to preserve peace, to prevent bloodshed; and I want you to help me, my girl. It may mean a little money for yourself to begin housekeeping with the sergeant."

"How much?" she asked, with such an eager, undisguised greed in her voice that it quite shocked the sensitive Mr. Reynolds, but at the same time assured him that she was quite safe.

"Shall we say fifty pounds down?" he asked slowly.

"It's a bargain!" she cried with glistening eyes "Where shall I bring my news?"

He scribbled his name and address on a sheet of paper, and handed it to her.

"You will sure to be there?" she asked.

"Certain, or at any rate they will tell you where to find me."

"And your men to take him? His lordship is a divil when he's roused."

"Have no fear; my men will be quite ready for their work. When do you hope to have news?"

"This evening for certain."

"That's right. Keep the address safe. Good-bye for the present."

"But——"

He stopped and looked round inquiringly, with his hand on the door-knob.

"That fifty pounds?"

"Oh, that will be quite safe; you may take my word for that."

"Sure, I'd take your honour's word and welcome for more than that; but still——"

"Still what?"

"I'd like a wee bit of writin', just to make sure."

"Then you can't have it—that's all!" he said sharply.

"And you shan't have his lordship," she retorted as sharply. "I will talk things over with me own boy. If there is credit or money to be

made out of the job, we may as well have it as another."

Reynolds was completely cowed in a moment. "My good girl," he interposed persuasively, "you are quite mistaken. There is no money or credit to be made out of the business except through me."

"Fifty pounds is a big lob of money, no doubt."

"A very substantial sum."

"If one was quite sure of it?"

"Come! come! what kind of writing do you want?" He seated himself at the desk.

"I promise," she dictated slowly, "to pay Miss Peggy Heffernan the sum of fifty pounds the day after Lord Edward is taken."

Reynolds began writing in a small, cramped hand.

"That won't do," said the girl sharply, looking over his shoulder.

"Why, that's what you asked me to write."

"Aye, but the writin' is not your own."

She laid the name and address he had just given her on the desk beside the other. They were quite different; the address was written free and large.

"I don't want any tricks of that sort. I want your own rale writin', and your own name like that at the end of it."

The girl was plainly roused and dangerous.

"It was only a joke of mine," Reynolds answered feebly, and he hastily wrote and signed the required promise in his own handwriting.

He blotted the paper, tearing the blotting-paper to pieces, folded it in a blank envelope, sealed it with his own seal, and handed it to Peggy.

"Mind, it's for your own use only," he said. "If the seal is broken, the bargain is off."

"If the seal is broken, the bargain is off," she repeated.

"You must promise to keep it secret even from the sergeant," he said, with what he meant for an arch smile.

"I'll swear it, if that pleases you."

With both hands clutching the letter behind her back, and every nerve and muscle on the strain, she watched him fumbling nervously at the door fastening without offering to help.

When the door closed behind him, her pent-up fury broke out in words.

"Oh, the low, crawlin' spy! the perjured villain! the black heart of a traitor! the hottest corner in hell would be too cold for him! Shure, the manest divil amongst them all would be ashamed of such company. Troth, I was hard set to keep my tongue and my hands off the disciple of Judas, and him huxtering with his blood money forninst my

face. Shure, Mr. Maurice was in the right of it. Many a decent man he stagged on before this, I'll be bound. He had chief hand in that black business at Mr. Bond's, I'm thinking. But this letter will put a sudden halt to his gallop. It would be a rale charity to send a bullet or a pikehead through his dirty carcase; and Christy is the boy to do it, if he just got wan peep at the writin'."

Chapter VI

ALL AMONG THE ORANGE LILIES

"Our indiscretions sometimes serve us well
When our deep plots do pall."

"ALL goes gloriously, Maurice, since we met," cried Lord Edward, leaping up to greet his friend as Blake came quietly into Mrs. Dillon's back drawing-room in Portobello. "I trust you bring me as good news from Wexford. By the way, you know Mr. Magan, of course—Counsellor Magan as his friends call him?"

At the writing-table opposite Lord Edward was seated a neat, prim, pale-faced little man, dressed like an old-fashioned print, with a high starched cravat rasping his smooth-shaven chin.

He rose with stiff formality, like an automaton, as Lord Edward spoke.

"I have the honour of knowing Counsellor Magan," Blake said smiling, and a smile wrinkled the parchment cheeks of the counsellor as they shook hands.

"I think that is all we have to-day, Magan,"

Lord Edward added. "I'm anxious those letters should be delivered as soon as possible, and there is no one but you I dare trust with them."

"They shall be duly delivered, my lord," the counsellor answered, in a dry monotone that fitted his appearance. He bowed at the door—a rectangular bow as if he has a hinge in his inflexible body—and disappeared.

"Who would guess who did not know, what a clear brain and brave, true heart," cried Lord Edward, "is hidden in that bit of dried-up lawyer's parchment? But once again, Maurice, what's your news from Wexford? You look gloomy; it cannot be that Wexford falls away?"

"The men of Wexford are true as steel," Blake interposed, "steel tempered by fierce rage and cold despair. They have no fear of death, because life is made worse than death to them; but they lack arms and they lack leaders. They are merely a valiant mob of whom a general might make an army. I wish you could give them a week of your time, Edward. Thady O'Flynn—you remember Thady, of course? the two-legged greyhound you used to call him—is in the district, and would gather the leaders in from the furthest corners of the country to meet you. They are brave, bright fellows as far as I have seen; but not a man amongst them has a notion of military

tactics. You are still our only general, Edward. If we lost you, our last hope is lost."

"That's rank nonsense," Lord Edward retorted laughingly; "besides, I am not lost nor found either for that matter, though I have had a couple of close shaves lately."

"So I might have expected," said Blake reproachfully, as to a too venturesome schoolboy, yet not without a touch of admiration at the careless courage of the young Geraldine.

"It was not my fault in the very least," Lord Edward protested; "not this time. You need not shake your head, Maurice; you shall judge for yourself. I rode out one night to reconnoitre the line of advance on the Kildare side of Dublin. It was a fine, clear moonlight, and everything passed off well. I was coming back in the best of spirits, just a little after midnight, through Palmerstown, when a patrol of yeomen, lurking in the black shadow of the hedgerow, broke suddenly out into the white moonlit road. The muzzle of a loaded musket was at my head before I could stir hand or foot to save myself."

"My God!" broke involuntarily from Blake, "that was indeed what you may call a 'close shave.' But how——"

"Oh, it went off all right. I don't mean the musket," said Lord Edward, laughing at his

friend's consternation. "I was a doctor at the time."

"A doctor?"

"Yes, a very simple disguise. You have only to carry a surgeon's pocket-case and a stethoscope, and those our good friend Dr. Adrian lent me. I threw open my coat to show that I was quite unarmed (I always carry my dagger in my riding-boot, and they did not search there). I was in a desperate haste, I protested, to attend a patient—an Orange patient, of course; no less a man than Lord Lake, whom I knew had been ailing. I was frantically angry at the delay; every moment, I swore, might mean life or death to his lordship. It was a neat bit of acting, I flatter myself. Anyhow, it quite captured the audience. They were most kind in directing me the way to Lord Lake's house. If I did not get there in time, the fault was not theirs."

"And the second close shave?"

"The second? Oh, well, it can be hardly called an escape when there was never any danger. The incident was really most encouraging. This time I was a cattle-jobber, coming in with a few sheep in front of me along the Chapelizod road to Dublin. The night was dark, and before I was aware a burly yeoman had his grip on my shoulder.

"'Your name?' he growled out.

"'Patrick Nolan,' I answered meekly, taking the first that came to hand.

"Before I was aware, he drew his tinder-box, and held the blazing fusee close to my face. I could see a quick look of surprise in his keen grey eyes, and a suppressed smile shake the roots of his heavy moustache.

"'Pass on, my lord,' he said sharply, and turned on his heel, leaving the way open into Dublin."

"A lucky escape as you say, and encouraging. But it makes me dizzy to think the risks you run when Ireland's fate—it may be for a century—hangs upon your single life."

"Don't growl, like a good fellow; all's well that ends well. Tell me what you have done in Wexford and elsewhere, and in return take my news since we met."

"Of Wexford there is little more to tell. The people are ready and eager. If courage alone could win battles, our cause was quite safe. But I have good news from America. The schooner I told you of, *The Western Hope*, loaded with swords, muskets and ball cartridges in flour and meal sacks, has left New York a week ago. In three weeks more, if the wind holds, she will be waiting orders in Westport Harbour—the quietest and least suspected in the Kingdom."

"Good news truly!" cried Lord Edward; "and

I have good news to match it. The organization has mended the breaches made by the arrest in Bond's. The spirit in Dublin is splendid. Our men are everywhere ripe for the rising; only waiting for the word, yet willing to wait. You have not seen the proclamation that we are about to issue to the people. Magan has just finished a fair copy for me. He has carried my scrawl off with him to copy for the printers. I won't weary you with the whole of it. But here is a bit or two." In a voice that gave force and fire to every ringing sentence he read:—

"For us the keen but momentary anxiety, occasioned by the situation of our invaluable friends, subsided, on learning all the circumstances of the case, into a calm tranquillity, a consoling conviction of mind, that they are as safe as innocence can make men now; and to these sentiments were quickly added a redoubled energy, a tenfold activity of exertion, which has already produced the happiest effects. The organization of the capital is perfect. No vacancies existing, arrangements have been made, and are still making, to secure for our oppressed brethren, whose trials approach, the benefit of legal defence; and the sentinels whom you have appointed to watch over your interests stand firm at their posts, vigilant of events,

and prompt to give you notice and advice, which on every occasion at all requiring it you may rely on receiving.

"This recital, Irishmen, is meant to guard those of you who are remote from the scene of the late events against the consequences of misrepresentation and mistake. The most unfounded rumours have been set afloat, fabricated for the double purpose of delusion and intimidation. Your enemies talk of treachery, in the vain and fallacious hope of creating it; but you, who scorn equally to be their dupes or their slaves, will meet their forgeries with dignified contempt, incapable of being either goaded into untimely violence, or sunk into pusillanimous despondency. Be firm, Irishmen, but be cool and cautious; be patient yet awhile; trust to no unauthorised communication; and above all we warn you, again and again we warn you, against doing the work of your tyrants, by premature, by partial or divided exertion. If Ireland shall be forced to throw away the scabbard, let it be at her own time, not at theirs."

"Glorious!" Blake cried, with admiration shining in his eyes. "No wonder, Edward, the Castle people are so eager to lay hands on you. You are the movement; you are the chief hope of the movement. For God's sake be careful! Keep

some of your caution you so eloquently preach to others for your own use."

"Croaking again. Why, I am as cautious as a lapwing and as easily scared."

"You have a large number of visitors I hear?"

"Men I must see. All good men and true; all heart and soul with us in the movement."

"Still be cautious; remember Reynolds."

"No," Lord Edward said with sudden earnestness; "I will forget Reynolds as soon and as thoroughly as I can. The mere thought of him sickens me. Treachery detected and exposed is no longer a danger."

"He was but one; there may be others."

"He was the only one. Caution is a good thing, I dare say, Maurice, but it may be carried too close to fear. No, no; I did not mean that to you of all the men in the world. But we can do nothing without confidence in our colleagues, and I must take my chance with the rest. I would rather trust a spy and be betrayed and die for it, than for one moment wrong a true friend by unjust suspicion."

"You are right," Blake answered heartily, "and I'm wrong. My fears for you make a coward of me. But I have heard strange stories of your pranks on the canal banks and boats at night with my youngster."

"Mrs. Dillon has turned informer," said Lord Edward laughingly.

"I mean to carry the boy off with me though."

"You shall do nothing of the kind. His mother would not hear of it, neither will I. Did not you say yourself he was as useful as a disguise. Nobody looks for conspiracy in the same house as a baby. Those romps of ours that you frown at put the police off their guard. Besides, you must go straight back to Wexford, and that's no place for babies just now. A truce to lecturing. Sit down. I want your advice. Our plans are ready; see, here are the returns."

Every trace of levity had vanished—it was the born general that spoke: "Ulster counts 110,990 sworn men. Munster, 100,634. Those figures show how strong our backing is in Dublin and the home counties. There are no detailed returns from Connaught. The organization has taken little hold there; but as you well know the people are with us to a man. Everything has shaped itself to our purpose. The rising is due within a month. Dublin will give the signal by the capture of the Castle. The whole plan of the assault is here. Wicklow, Wexford and Kildare will pour in reinforcements to our aid. See, the routes marked on these maps are still quite open. The north will rise at the news. Belfast is already half our own; we will

carry it without a blow. I tell you the thing cannot fail."

"With you to lead us," Blake said.

"I will be there—or dead. I don't know what has come to you of late, Maurice; you did not use to be such a death's head at a feast."

"A black foreboding has taken hold of me; I cannot shake it off."

"Get you to Wexford; I know you of old; action and danger are your only medicine."

"But why to Wexford? they want no urging there."

"No, no, your task is not to urge them on but hold them back. A premature outbreak in Wexford would ruin all. They must wait the signal from Dublin. You must tell them that——"

Again they plunged into military details, and for an hour were absorbed in figures, maps and tracings, till at last Lord Edward seemed to inspire Blake with something of his own cheeriness.

But when at last they gripped hands and parted, a reaction came, and the young soldier, with the weight of a great movement on his shoulders, dropped wearily into his chair with a shadow of his friend's presentiment on his face.

He was still seated with bowed head when there burst into the room a bright three-year-old boy, a tangle of gold curls streaming behind him. He

stopped short half-way, broke a shout off in the middle, and stared blankly round with wide-open blue eyes.

"Come here to me, Val," cried Lord Edward from the recesses of his easy chair; and the child ran to him at once.

"Where's pappy?" he queried eagerly.

"Gone."

"All gone?"

"Every scrap."

The tears began to gather in the babyish blue eyes.

"Your Pappy is a very wicked man," Lord Edward added gravely.

The boy forgot his grief in his wrath.

"He's better than 'oo, and bigger than 'oo"—as if that clinched the question.

"Would you like to go away with him, Val?"

"If 'oo come too."

"No, I must stay here."

"Then I tant go away. Pappy told me to be sure and keep 'oo out of mistiff."

Lord Edward caught him under the arms and swung him with a broad sweep high over his head, the gold curls flying wide like a halo.

The child crowed with delight. But the moment the little feet touched the carpet, again came the persistent question, "Where's pappy?"

"What do you want of him?"

"I'se a bootiful flower for him."

"Let's see it."

He opened his chubby tight-shut fist, and showed the squashed bud of an orange lily.

Then Lord Edward gravely picked the mess of leaves from the little soft palm, dropped it on the floor, and set his foot on it.

The child watched him with wide-eyed amazement. "My poor nittle flower" was all he said, but the baby lips quivered and the tears began to gather.

"That's a wicked, wicked flower, Val," Lord Edward said with mock solemnity; "there is a cruel fairy lives in that flower that loves always to hurt and kill good people."

"Then we'll go and kill all the bad fairies," cried the boy, his trouble instantly forgotten in the delightful prospect of killing something. "I know where they live—all in a row by the wall at the end of the garden; and I'll cut their heads all off with my new sword."

"Well done, Val, and I'll help with my walking-stick," cried Lord Edward. With that he lifted his companion in arms through the French window out into the garden, and with the gay warrior perched on his shoulders raced down the central walk.

The orange lilies grew in a thick bed close to

the wall by the road and directly facing Lord Edward's window. There was a low gate at the corner, and close to it a large laburnum tree, already golden with spring.

Val led the assault gallantly, striking down the tall flowers to right and left with his toy tin sword; Lord Edward aided and abetted with a riding-cane. As the flowers fell aside the young soldier's quick eye noticed the signs of trampling feet in the clay between the stalks. He looked closer, and found the clear traces of a heavy military boot. Then he made a startling discovery. A speck of lighter colour showed on the dark ground through the tangled green of the stricken flowers. He thrust in his hand and drew out a ball cartridge, with the end bitten off ready for loading. It had rained heavily the previous evening, but the cartridge was nearly dry, and he could feel the crumpling of the dry powder under his finger-tips through the paper. The inference was easy: it had been dropped during the night from the clumsy fingers of a soldier, who had scaled the gate and hidden behind the laburnum tree amongst the orange lilies.

There was but one explanation of the ambuscade. Lord Edward's hiding-place had been discovered or betrayed, and the Government were making ready for a pounce.

All this passed through his mind in an instant, while the child with shouts of triumph strewed the conquered lilies on the ground.

"Come along, Val," he said; "it's time to get back."

"There are only two more wicked flowers alive," Val cried, as the last of the ill-fated lilies fell to one vigorous flourish of his sword.

"Now I'se all right," he said proudly, sheathing his sword and gazing with the eyes of a conqueror at the thick tangle of bruised and scattered stalks and leaves.

Half way back to the house they met Norah coming to search for them.

"What mischief have you two been at?" she began gaily, when the troubled look in Lord Edward's face caught her eyes. "What has happened, Edward? You look anxious. Is that boy of mine worrying you? Val, run away and play. Your soldiers are on the dressing-table in my room," as the boy scampered off. "I fear by your face, Edward, some misfortune has come to us."

"Good fortune, rather, Norah. I have had a lucky warning, and all through Val's romps. I found this amongst the orange lilies that he was slaughtering."

"What is this?" she asked, examining the

cartridge he put in her hand; "and what does it mean?"

"It is a musket cartridge," he answered, "and it means that there was a soldier hidden last night in the garden. It means the Castle knows I'm here, and have set a watch on me."

Norah grew pale to the very lips. "You must go at once," she whispered excitedly in a very passion of fear.

"There is no need for haste," he answered quietly, smiling at her excitement.

"But they could seize you at any moment?"

"They could, but they won't. They could a week ago probably, but they didn't. I think I can guess why. They have me in a trap ready when they want me. But my capture just now might stop the rising. They will do nothing for the present unless they suspect that I suspect. An attempt at escape would put them on the alert at once."

"That would not matter if you succeeded."

"But how? They are bound to have men to watch every stir. There is Moore, the wool merchant, or Murphy, both in Thomas Street. They would either be glad to shelter me; but how to get there safely is the question."

There was silence for a moment. Norah had

fallen into a brown study, and looked at him with vacant eyes that saw nothing.

Her excitement came back with a sudden start. "I have it!" she cried, with brightening eyes and cheeks; "a splendid plan. You say you need not start for a few days?"

"Or a few weeks. The Castle cat is in no hurry to catch the mouse it has under its paw. But what's your plan?"

"I must see Dr. Adrian first and make quite sure. Is Moore's or Murphy's the safest?"

"Moore's I should say, for the present at least; but——"

"There are no 'buts.' I must run away now, for I have a lot to do. This is Tuesday; my plan will be ready on Wednesday morning, if you are."

At ten o'clock on Wednesday Lord Edward, disguised as a young Frenchman, face darkened and moustache waxed and turned up at the tips, started out of Portobello with Norah. It was his usual disguise, and they had heretofore flattered themselves that it was impenetrable. Now they knew that at every street corner keen eyes saw the young rebel under it. But neither he nor Norah had bated one jot of the perfect make-up on that account, and they chattered French gaily as they walked.

With eyes quickened by knowledge they caught sight of stealthy figures following or skulking at street corners or archways as they passed. Once Lord Edward thought he saw the bulky form of the redoubtable Major Sirr himself amongst the skulkers.

The two walked far and fast in the direction of Kilmainham, giving the spies a busy time of it.

Hard by Kilmainham the lady grew suddenly faint, and would have fallen if the French gentleman had not caught her in his arms. He was naturally much alarmed, and his cries and gestures—wildly excited after the fashion of his nation—quickly gathered a crowd, to whom he made frantic unintelligible appeals.

Some of the passers-by wanted to carry the lady into an adjoining house, but quite failed to get her excited companion to understand.

Luckily at that moment a carriage came up, moving at a foot pace through the gathering crowd.

A face showed itself through a window of the brougham—a handsome face with clear, brave eyes.

Instantly a shout was raised. "It's Dr. Adrian himself!" cried the nearest of the crowd; "the best doctor in Dublin."

This time the young Frenchman seemed to understand. "*Doctaire? doctaire?*" he queries, anxiously.

Helped by willing hands he carried the half-conscious figure towards the brougham. Dr. Adrian felt her pulse anxiously, murmured a few words of French to his companion, and himself helped her to a seat in the carriage.

The young Frenchman sprung in after them, the door banged, the coachman whipped up the pair of horses, the carriage broke through the scattering crowd and swept down the street, swaying from right to left with the furious speed of the galloping horses.

Without checking its pace for a moment it turned sharp into Thomas Street. Some way down the street, opposite the house of a Mr. Moore, a wool merchant, the swaying carriage came perilously near to the kerb-stone, just for a moment. But in that moment the carriage door opened and a lithe figure leaped lightly out across the side-path, through the open door, and disappeared into the house. The carriage swerved again to the middle of the road, and tore along towards the city.

Going down Cork Hill Dr. Adrian put his head again out of the window.

"It's all right, my dear," he said to Norah,

who had completely recovered from her sudden fainting fit; "there are two mounted yeomen following the carriage at a hand gallop. I think I will tell the coachman to drive more slowly; it is not fair to give the Castle unnecessary annoyance."

Chapter VII

THE WARNING

"He'd seen his duty a dead sure thing,
And went for it there and then."

"I THINK I am entitled to some consideration," said Mr. Reynolds hotly.

"Certainly, my dear sir; certainly," Mr. Secretary Cooke blandly replied.

They were alone together in Mr. Cooke's room in the Castle. The under-secretary was seated, comfortable and imperturbable, at his desk. Mr. Thomas Reynolds was standing before him, nervously biting his nails.

"Your claims," Cooke went on smoothly as the purring of a cat, "are fully recognised by the Government. But ——"

"Lord Edward Fitzgerald!" Reynolds interrupted; "I know what you were going to say. But it was no fault of mine that he escaped. I did my best. I left no stone unturned. Even now I cannot understand how it was managed;

there was some damned deceit and treachery at work."

He spoke with such genuine indignation of the "damned deceit and treachery" that even Cooke himself could not restrain a smile.

"I have good reason to complain," Reynolds continued, with vehement self-pity that filled his eyes with tears. "I have risked my life in the service of the Government; I am risking it still. I have been basely betrayed to the rebels. The assassins are on my track, and the Government, in requital for my services and sacrifices, are behaving with the grossest ingratitude."

"There seems to me only one course open to you," Cooke rejoined blandly, when at last he got a chance of getting in a word.

"I know that. I must get out of this infernal country as soon as I can. I want money to get out of the country and live out of it, and money I must have."

"'Must' is a very strong word, Mr. Reynolds."

"It is a word my services entitle me to use to the Government."

"Pray let us consider the matter coolly. You will forgive me for putting things plainly. The Government pays for value received; so far they have received little or no value from you. Lord Edward Fitzgerald slipped through your fingers."

"But Bond and the others were captured."

"Yes, captured; but they are white elephants to us if we cannot convict them."

"Well?" uneasily.

"Candidly, we want your evidence."

"Then you shan't have it," cried the terrified spy. "I have your promise that even my name should be kept secret."

"So it has been; so it will be—unless you change your mind."

"Never; never; never!"

"Don't excite yourself unnecessarily, Mr. Reynolds; let us talk the thing over quietly. We want your testimony — want it very badly."

"Why did you not think of that before?"

"Why? We hoped for documentary evidence. You yourself gave us reason to hope."

"I did my best. I did not spare myself. I called three separate times at Oliver Bond's house after his arrest. That was no pleasant duty I assure you. Apart from the danger of the thing, it was very painful to me to meet the wife of that man and converse with her as a friend. I kept my eyes open and my hands ready. But I could not lay hold of even a scrap of paper. As to Lord Edward, I——"

"Yes, yes," Cooke interrupted a little impa-

tiently; "we know all that. We never for one moment doubted your good intentions. But the Government does not pay for good intentions, my good sir, but for good results."

"But I could not do this thing; I dare not."

"I fancy you might," said Mr. Cooke persuasively. "I really believe you had best for your own sake. If you give yourself a little time to think it over, you will see there is no additional danger incurred by going into the witness-box. You are already suspected, you tell me." (Reynolds winced.) "Now, I admit at once it would be very inconvenient for the Government that you should leave the country just at present; but, on the other hand, do you think it would be quite safe for yourself? Irish vengeance has a long arm, as you know, Mr. Reynolds. If, however, you come over openly to us, we would be both willing and able to protect you."

"But my personal honour and reputation would be most grievously compromised," Reynolds protested theatrically. "Patriotism has its duties, of course, and I have endeavoured to fulfil them. I have spared no sacrifice, and shunned no danger, in the interests of my country's safety. But I have my feelings, Mr. Cooke, and I feel my motives would be most vilely misconstrued if I appeared in the witness-box to give evidence

against my old friends and colleagues on trial for their lives. Malicious men would say——"

"The approval of your own conscience would support you against ignorant and malignant calumny," Cooke answered, grave as a mustard pot; "the *mens conscia recti*. You know all that kind of thing. Besides, the Government would, of course, be prepared to make ample allowance for your wounded feelings; very liberal allowance indeed, Mr. Reynolds."

"I will think over it," said Reynolds, taking up his hat.

"And do it," added Cooke under his breath, sinking back in his chair with a sigh of satisfaction as the door closed behind his visitor.

"Come in!" he cried a moment afterwards, in response to a sharp knock of peremptory knuckles.

A strange figure bustled into the room in response to this invitation. A coarse, gross, stunted figure, extravagantly dressed in vulgar, flaunting colours, with a flaming red face, blotched and pimpled with dissipation and disease. But there was unfathomable cunning in the keen, small, pig's eyes of the man, and the heavy jowl showed courage and determination both.

"My dear Higgins; my dear Squire,' said Cooke, jumping up from his seat to shake him

cordially by the hand, "what's the best news with you?"

"Our bird has flown," Higgins blurted out; "no one knows where, and no one knows how."

"That's bad news indeed," cried Cooke, visibly annoyed. "How was it managed, or mismanaged?"

"That I cannot tell you; a regular conjurer's trick. He was walking with his French girl near Kilmainham. She fainted, or pretended to faint I daresay. Dr. Adrian's carriage drew up at the moment. You know Dr. Adrian?"

Cooke nodded a grim assent.

"Well, the girl was helped in; our friend jumped in after her, and they set off at the devil of a rate. Our fellows were completely taken by surprise for a moment, and entangled in the crowd that had gathered. But they gave the alarm as soon as they could. Two mounted police started hot foot after the carriage. They caught sight of it first at the end of Thomas Street, and followed it close to Adrian's door, but only the doctor and girl were in it when they arrived. Our bird must have flown through the window."

"But where did he light?"

"How can I tell?"

"Does our friend Magan know?"

"No more than myself, I believe, though he

lets on to be full of information. He has been as surly as a bear with a sore head lately; says the Castle is treating him badly."

"They all say that," interposed Cooke.

"That may be. But I had to give Magan fifty pounds of my own money to keep him in good humour. Of course I knew you would not see me at the loss of the money."

"Of course not, my dear Higgins," the secretary responded promptly.

There was an expectant pause.

Then Cooke counted fifty guineas from a drawer on the right-hand side of his desk, and with one motion of his big red hand Higgins swept the jingling gold into his yawning pocket.

"You must be careful of the coin," said Cooke, with a hand on his arm; "money is to be spent freely. Spent, my dear Higgins, you will observe, but not squandered."

"All right, I'll remember; but that offer for Lord Edward still holds good?"

"Certainly; a thousand pounds the day he is lodged in Newgate for the man that helps to put him there."

"Well, Magan will do his best. He is a devil to pick up a cold scent, and I can tell you myself ——What the devil was that?"

"What was what?"

"I thought I heard a kind of tapping at the door."

"Don't look so frightened," said Cooke, laughing. "It was probably Major Sirr. I have an appointment with him at this hour."

"Then I'd best leave you?"

He walked to the door at the right side (there were two in the room) and turned the handle. It was locked.

"Not that door," Cooke said, "the other."

"But it was at this I heard the knocks."

"It could not have been. There is a thick double door there; you could not hear a musket-shot through."

Again the knocking came. This time unmistakably at the door on the left.

"You see," Cooke said, "I was right. Come in!"

Thereupon Major Sirr marched majestically into the room. Two pistols were stuck prominently in his belt, and his hand pressed down his sword-hilt till the curved end made the broad skirt of his coat stick out behind like a cock's tail.

Higgins and Sirr interchanged a curt nod and a low growl of salutation surlily, as two curs competing for the same bone.

"You will excuse me, Cooke," cried Higgins, with a clumsy assumption of familiarity, "but I really cannot stay a moment longer. I have an

appointment with my Lord Clonmel. He does me the honour of dining at my little place to-day. Good-morning, my dear Cooke. Good-morning, Major Sirr," and he was gone.

Sirr helped himself unasked to a chair, clanking his steel scabbard angrily against the floor.

"I wonder you can tolerate such fellows," he said almost insolently to Cooke.

"They are useful, my dear Major; they are useful."

"The devil a bit. 'The sham Squire' is a born liar. You could not trust him as far as you could throw him."

"He has too keen a regard for his own interests to lie to me," Cooke said smiling; "and other people must take their chance."

"He's a low swindler."

"Well, my dear Major, what then?" Cooke asked with a smile, that might mean insult or flattery. "We have no vacancies for saints in the Castle."

"That other chap, Reynolds, is worse," grumbled the Major, "and he's a d——d snob into the bargain. He's mighty particular about his honour and reputation."

"Skin-deep, my dear Major; skin-deep. I assure you it does not in the least spoil him as a spy."

"It puts him above the work that he's paid for. Why, we let Lord Edward Fitzgerald slip through our fingers the other day through his d——d squeamishness. I can understand a chap like Jemmy O'Brien. If he's a spy, at least he has the decency not to be ashamed of his profession, and you can always rely upon him to swear straight."

Cooke laughed softly at the Major's enthusiasm.

"Yes," he said, "our friend James would be an excellent swearer if we could get any one to believe him. But the other day, after Curran was done with your straight-swearing James, even a carefully selected jury of specially appointed Castle tradesmen refused to hang a man on his oath. No one sees James in the witness-box without wishing him in the dock. Indeed, I must say I won't be sorry myself when the hangman rids us of him. But then you see, Major,"—with a sly touch of malice—"Reynolds is a highly respectable man."

"D——n his respectability. He is the dirtiest dog of the two."

"That may be, but he does not look it, which makes all the difference in the world. Reynolds is useful; very useful."

"How about Lord Edward?" sneered Sirr.

"That was your fault more than his."

"Mine!"

"Yours or your men's, Major. Lord Edward was in the house when Reynolds set you to guard it. He slipped out through the midst of your blockheads disguised as a country girl. He has been in hiding at a Mrs. Dillon's house, in Portobello, for the last three weeks."

"How do you know all that?"

"Well, that's my little secret."

"He's there yet?" the Major asked with sudden eagerness.

Again Cooke laughed. "That you may nab him and claim the reward? No, no, my dear Major, it won't work; I'm sorry to say it won't work. He has slipped through our fingers."

"Again?"

"Again, as you say. Vanished, leaving no track behind. My very best bloodhound is completely at fault this time."

In a few words he told him the story he had just heard from Higgins, concealing only the name of his informant.

"We might squeeze the truth out of Dr. Adrian," the major suggested. "The fellow is a cursed rebel in disguise, and a d——n thin disguise. A touch of the pitch cap, or the flogging horse at Beresford's Riding School would do him no harm."

"No, no, we daren't do it," Cooke interposed; "three-fourths of the Court ladies are among Adrian's patients. Rebel or no rebel he is the best ladies' doctor in Dublin; they can do nothing without him. We will track the rebel without troubling the doctor."

"He must have escaped from the carriage between Kilmainham and the near end of Thomas Street," cried Sirr, with sudden inspiration.

"That's as clear as mud, I should say; but it does not help us much."

"Stop a bit. There is a notorious rebel, named Moore, lives in Thomas Street; the far end near Kilmainham. I've secret information of arms hidden in his house. I may find something better than arms if I search. It's a long shot, it's true, but it's worth trying."

He spoke loudly and excitedly, and even the placid Cooke showed his excitement too.

"Search the house to-morrow, Major; thoroughly, mind."

"You may trust me for that. I will turn it upside down and inside out. I'll poke into every mouse-hole. If that growling devil, old Clare himself, was to——"

The door opened suddenly, and "that growling devil, old Clare himself," stalked into the room.

The words froze on Sirr's lips, and he glanced

furtively at the intruder, fearing he had been overheard.

But Lord Clare, with face imperturbable as a mask, looked him through and through, quietly ignoring his presence.

"Cooke," he said abruptly to the under-secretary, "I saw that fellow Higgins in the corridor just now. I assumed he was coming from you; he is not a man in any way to be trusted. I am amazed that Clonmel and the rest, even Camden himself, tolerate a low, vulgar creature of the kind."

"He's useful," said Cooke. It was his universal formula covering a multitude of sins. "He has helped us, my lord, and may help us again in this matter of Lord Edward."

Clare's face lit up with sudden animation. "What! 'the sham Squire'!" he cried; "is he too a conscience-stricken member of this infernal conspiracy?"

"No, not he; but he keeps a pointer, a very keen-nosed and very well-trained pointer."

"What's his name?"

"Excuse me, my lord," with a side glance at Sirr, "that's for your lordship's private ear."

"Yes, yes, quite right; never mind the dog's name, but get him on the scent at once. There is no time to be wasted; no chance to be lost."

"You, too," he added, turning sharply to Sirr,

who winced under the fiery glance of those fierce black eyes, "give yourself wholly to this task. Mind! let there be no bungling next time. Lord Edward MUST be caught. He is the head and heart of this conspiracy. It will go hard with us all if he should live to lead it. The integrity of the Empire depends on his capture."

"A thousand pounds depends on it, my lord; that's enough for me," replied Sirr, with a nervous attempt at a laugh.

Clare looked at him steadily for a moment or two, then turned on his heel and walked to the door.

"Cooke," he said, looking back, with his hand on the door knob, "I wish for a few words with you alone if you can spare me the time."

With much fumbling of his sword and cocked hat, Sirr got himself awkwardly out of the room. Cooke bidding him good-bye, shook a warning forefinger and whispered, "Don't forget the search to-morrow."

The major nodded emphatically and skulked hastily away, quite cowed. The skulk changing to a swagger when he felt himself clear of Lord Clare.

Meanwhile Cooke turning in the opposite direction, followed his chief down the long corridor to his own private sanctum, where he held his

audiences, and issued his commands; for Clare—not Camden—was the real master in the Castle.

Cooke's room was empty and silent for one moment. Then from that double door at the right hand side, a man slipped noiselessly. His coat was off, he had a carpenter's paper cap on his head and a hammer in his right hand. His pale face was daubed and streaked with perspiration, wiped with dirty fingers; but it was an honest and brave face, with a brave purpose shining in the steady eyes.

The man listened breathlessly until he heard the footsteps die away to silence in the long corridor. Then he crept back to the recess between the double doors, where he had been at work repairing the outer panels. With the claw of the hammer he wrenched one of the hinges clean from the woodwork, twisting it out of all shape. Hastily struggling into his coat, with the broken hinge conspicuous in his hand, he ran through the long corridor leading to the Upper Castle Yard.

"Halloa, Tuite; what's up?" the hall porter cried from the recesses of his great leathern chair.

"Broken," said Tuite laconically, holding out the hinge. "I'm off to Kennedy's Lane for a new one. I won't be ten minutes away."

Before the porter could grumble out his consent, he was gone.

While he was still in sight of the Castle gates Tuite walked fast, but the moment he got round the corner the honest fellow took to his heels and ran with breathless speed to Moore's, in Thomas Street. Two minutes told his story; two minutes more and he was hurrying back to the Castle at the same headlong speed, leaving confusion and consternation behind him.

Chapter VIII

BETRAYED

"A higher fame can no man have
Than he who dies his friend to save;
Nor deeper infamy than he
Who slays his friend by treachery.
Of his cursed clay vile weeds are made,
His soul is in the pit's black shade.
Despised by devils in lowest hell
Judas and he together dwell."

IT so chanced that there were only two women—Mrs. Moore and her daughter—in the house when honest Tuite burst upon them with his terrifying warning. Lord Edward was away organizing in Kildare. Norah Blake, fearing her presence might help the Castle spies to Lord Edward's new hiding-place, had returned to Mrs. Dillon's.

The two women were in a very frenzy of fear as they watched Tuite go rushing back to the Castle. As women will, they had made patriotism a religion. Lord Edward was as a God to them. The terror of his capture and death took away

from them all power of clear thought or decided action. They could only wring their hands and weep, glancing piteously from one to the other for help or hope.

It so chanced—unlucky chance—that the weeping girl's despairing glance caught sudden sight of a prim figure moving staidly past the window at the other side of the street—a small man dressed with quaint preciseness, his head held straight by a huge, white, stiffly-starched scarf.

Poor distracted Miss Moore drew a quick breath of relief and joy at the sight.

"It is Counsellor Magan, mother," she cried rapturously; "God Himself has sent him to our assistance."

The women's fingers tapped at the window pane together.

Magan, waking up from a brown study, turned a sour, discontented face, and saw the hands beckoning to him. Steadily, without quickening his pace in the least, he crossed the street to the door that opened as he came.

"There is no cause for uneasiness," said the counsellor quietly, when the women, having drawn him into a back room, told their alarming story, with many impetuous interruptions of each other, "none in the least."

His confidence comforted the poor weeping

creatures amazingly. They dried their tears, hanging on his words. This hard-faced, saturnine little man was to them as an angel of light.

"But I'm afraid you don't understand, Counsellor," Mrs. Moore interposed; "we are so stupid and put out you may have taken the thing up wrong from us. The house is to be searched tomorrow night. Lord Edward will be taken."

"Yes, certainly, ma'am, if Lord Edward is here at the time," Magan answered, as precisely as if he were arguing a law point.

"But where can he go to? Where can we find a safe hiding-place for him at such short notice?"

"I have thought of that too," answered Counsellor Magan, letting the words drop slowly from him. "He must come to my house close by, on Usher's Quay. He'll be quite safe there."

They uttered a simultaneous cry of delight. Here was indeed a quick and easy escape from the close threatening danger.

"But this will mean a terrible danger for you, Counsellor!" Mrs. Moore ventured in timid admiration.

"It is my duty," he replied curtly.

"It was indeed Heaven sent you to us," said Mrs. Moore, sobbing with joy as she caught up his stiff, cold, bony hand, and kissed and wept over it.

But Counsellor Magan was not to be stirred by the women's fervour from his chill, prim self-control.

"When does Lord Edward return?" he asked in his dry, business-like voice.

"In about an hour, unless—we can never be quite sure of his movements. You'll wait for him, of course?"

"Yes, I'll wait for him."

In less than an hour there came a peculiar tap at the door.

The servant opened it, and there walked into the hall a respectably-dressed, middle-aged man, Mr. Moore's gigantic apprentice, Gallagher, followed, watching him like a hawk.

"Mr. Moore at home?" asked the stranger in a sharp Northern accent.

"No, sir," the servant answered; "but the missus herself maybe will——"

At this juncture Mrs. Moore appeared upon the scene.

"I am Mrs. Moore," she said graciously, showing him into the parlour, where her daughter and the counsellor were; "if you have any message for my husband I will be happy to take it."

"Thanks, ma'am," the other answered stiffly, "I need not trouble you, I think. I had just one question to ask your husband. My name is

Jameson. I travel in wool for Inglis and Erskine, of Glasgow. I was recommended to your husband. But to be plain with you, ma'am, from what I have heard I don't think it likely we will do business."

"What have you heard to my husband's discredit?" cried Mrs. Moore, bristling up; in her heart glad to get rid of the man.

"I have heard, ma'am, that he is grievously suspected of harbouring that notorious rebel Lord Edward Fitzgerald," he retorted curtly.

The answer struck home. Counsellor Magan's lower jaw dropped as far as the starched cravat would let it. The colour died suddenly out of Miss Moore's face; a faint sick feeling stole over her, and her knees trembled so that she could scarcely stand. Her mother stared at the man open-eyed, open-mouthed, unable to utter a word; only vaguely conscious that the huge apprentice, Gallagher, whom she had thought fidelity itself, was grinning behind with intense amusement.

Lord Edward's own voice broke the silence.

"Pray pardon me, ladies," he entreated, as he plucked the wig from his head and the grey whiskers from his cheeks, "and you too, my old friend. I am really distressed at the effect of my little jest. But I could not resist the temptation of putting my disguise to the test. Delighted to see you, Counsellor. All has gone well since we met.

I had a splendid reception to-day in Kildare. Our men are like horses at the starting-post—impatient for the word. But how, in wonder's name, did you find me out here?"

"A fortunate accident," Magan answered with his usual methodical deliberation. "I live close by at Usher's Quay. The ladies and I are old acquaintances. It happened that Mrs. Moore saw me pass half an hour ago. Mrs. Moore beckoned to me, and I——"

But here Mrs. Moore broke in herself impatiently on his slow sentences with an excited narrative of Tuite's warning, their terror, and the generous offer of the counsellor." It was an angel's visit indeed," she wound up; "he came to our aid when we most needed him."

The counsellor waved a deprecating hand, but Lord Edward, much moved by his prompt kindness, thanked him earnestly.

"I am deeply grateful, Magan," he said, wringing his hand, "deeply grateful. But let me say at once it is no more than I should have expected from your unselfish devotion. I take your generous offer as freely as it is made for the great cause's sake which we have both at heart. In your watchful friendship I shall feel perfectly secure."

"I shall try hard to deserve your lordship's

confidence," Magan answered, and for the first time there was a slight tremor in his voice.

"There is just one thing more," Lord Edward began and hesitated.

"And that is?" the counsellor asked.

"It is a weakness I know, and a rebel should have no weaknesses, but I am longing for just one look at Pam—my wife I mean—and my little ones, before the fighting begins a fortnight hence. This may be my last chance."

The women were weeping silently, even the dry as dust counsellor was visibly affected.

"Where is her ladyship at present?" he asked.

"At Lord Moira's on Usher's Quay, close by."

"It is but a couple of doors from where I live. When your lordship comes to my house we can easily——"

"But now, to-day; it must be to-day or not at all. She returns to Leinster House to-morrow. I have heard of her visit to Moira's house by the merest chance."

Magan pondered for a moment.

"I think you might safely venture it," he said.

"I was in hope you would say so. You will come with me; you, being so close a neighbour, will divert suspicion. Besides, I would like my wife herself to thank you."

For just one moment the counsellor hesitated,

wholly taken aback at the request. Then he answered steadily, "I am quite at your lordship's service, if you desire it."

"In twenty minutes then I will be ready," cried Lord Edward gaily; "I cannot go to Lord Moira as a wool merchant, you know."

He ran upstairs to his room like a schoolboy, leaving Magan with the grateful and admiring ladies in the parlour.

Within twenty minutes he was back again; a tall, comely country girl, with dark red petticoat and plaided shawl.

"Yes, I think that will do," he said, in answer to their surprise. "This same disguise carried me through before. My wife, I know, happens to want a nursery-maid—a country-girl preferred. As a friend of the family, Counsellor, do you think you can conscientiously recommend me for the place?"

"I am sure her ladyship will be pleased to give you a trial," returned Magan with prim pleasantry. "Does she expect you, my lord?"

"Oh! no, she does not even know I am in Dublin. We have not met for a month, and I have not even had a chance to write to her. Are you ready to start at once, Counsellor?"

They were a curiously assorted couple that walked from Thomas Street down Watling Street to Usher's Quay. But on that they were the more

likely to attract notice, but to divert suspicion; for nobody dreamt of finding the noble leader of the rebellion in such a disguise or in such company.

Pamela, with her babies around her, was sitting in the drawing-room of Moira House, whose row of windows looked out upon the river. The room was panelled in mother of pearl, on whose polished surface the soft light trembled in changing colours, delicate and subtle and beautiful as the sky at sunset. The furniture was of green and gold, the tables strewn with ornaments costly and graceful; and half a score of convex mirrors set in the rich walls gave the back the glow and colour of the room in miniature prospective. It was a scene in fairyland, and Pamela, in the glory of her young loveliness, was as the fairy queen.

She seemed to be a charming child playing at wife and mother. Across an inlaid table at her elbow drooped the heavy folds of a green silk flag, with a half finished sunburst shining in its centre, and the tasselled ends trailing on the rich carpet. But the hand that held the threaded needle lay idly in her lap, and the soft eyes looked listlessly out on the shining water.

At a little distance a dark-eyed, curly-pated boy of three, perched perilously on a tall chair, arrayed his great army of tin soldiers on the smooth surface of a polished table. On a soft rug at her

feet a baby girl rolled and crowed, resplendent in white lace with broad blue sash, and bows of blue ribbon edging her dimpled neck and arms. The chubby hands held a huge doll in uncertain clasp close to a cheek flushed with the tint of the wild rose leaf, and the baby stared at its mother with wise, wondering eyes.

There came a sharp knock to the door. Pamela started nervously from her day dream, and caught the infant in her arms.

"A young person to see you, my lady," said the footman; "about the situation, my lady. Counsellor Magan brought her."

"Show them up, Thomas."

The visitors came in, slowly and bashfully it seemed. While Thomas still lingered, "the young person" stood with face half averted, but the instant the door closed on the prying footman, she stepped into the full light in the centre of the room.

Pamela threw one quick, curious glance at the comely, smiling face. Only one was needed; love's eyes are keen to pierce through all disguises. With a little cry of joy she went impetuously, baby and all, into the open arms of her young husband So they rested for a moment in each other's arms, silent; drawing deep breaths of unspeakable delight. Presently they found themselves seated

side by side on the velvet couch, with hands clasped tight, while lips and eyes overflowed with a quick stream of question and reply, broken by intervals of passionate caressing. The baby in its mother's lap crowed delightedly, while the boy clung, half frightened, to her skirts, and gazed in open-eyed surprise at his father's strange attire.

At last Pamela's glance lighted by chance on Counsellor Magan, who stood retiringly in the furthermost corner of the room, his eyes cast down and his hat clasped awkwardly between his hands. She turned with a startled, questioning look to her husband.

"A dear old friend of mine, Pamela; a tried and trusted friend." In a few whispered words he told her how nobly the counsellor had come to his rescue, passing lightly over the danger that threatened him, yet not so lightly but Pamela's quick love divined it, and the flush of joy in her soft cheeks faded into dead white as she listened.

"Magan," Lord Edward called out heartily, "my wife wants to thank you for her husband, and my babies for their father."

She welcomed the abashed counsellor with smiling lips and eyes. Then, in her quick, impulsive way, she caught his hand in both of hers and kissed it.

"It is with all my heart I thank you, our very dear friend," she cried in pretty foreign tones.

"I Pray the good God to well reward you as you deserve. Baby must thank you too." She held out the small bundle of ringlets and ribbons till the little rose-bud lips touched the withered cheek. "Kiss him, my sweetest angel; kiss the good man that saved papa."

The baby dived down with chubby fingers at the emerald pin that shone, a spark of green, in "the good man's" starch cravat, and crowed and kicked one worsted boot off its dimpled foot in the exuberance of its joy.

Then the boy came up, more shyly, with something of fear in his big eyes, and put his little hand timidly in the counsellor's wrinkled, and lisped out the words of thanks after his mother.

"Honest Tom Magan" seemed quite overcome by their gratitude. He moistened his dry lips twice with his tongue before he could speak a word in reply.

"I have only done my duty, my lady," he muttered at last; "I want no thanks for that."

"You have given me my husband's life, sir," she said with sweet wifely dignity that well became her. "For that I will pray for you night and morning while I live, and I will teach my children, his children, to bless your name."

"Honest Tom" (his composure now quite come back to him) bowed a formal acknowledgment

with no more apparent emotion than a figure of wood.

A second half-hour went by as swiftly as the first, till Lord Edward, with a sudden tightening of the lips as one nerving himself against a painful wrench, rose to go.

"Oh Edward, not so soon! I have scarcely spoken to you, scarcely seen you yet."

"The time has gone quickly, my darling, but I have been a full hour here, and hours are precious with me now, for there is much to be done."

"But when you are near to me with our good friend"—she smiled sweetly on Magan—"you will see me some time for a little minute—is it not so?"

"I hope so, I hope so; if it is possible, Pam, be sure I will. Now, indeed, I must be gone."

He caught up his children one after the other in his arms and kissed them. His wife was last. They clung together as though they could never part. But he gently drew himself from her close embrace, unclasping the small hands tenderly.

Before he had gone three paces towards the door she caught him by the arm, laughing through her tears.

"Oh Edward!" she cried, "behold it has disarranged itself altogether. All the world will mock themselves of it; see!"

She drew him into a little boudoir, formed in a deep alcove, and shut with a brocaded silk curtain from the drawing-room, where a huge Venetian mirror covered one side of the wall from floor to ceiling. Opposite this she planted him, standing close beside, and pointing with a mocking finger at his bedraggled figure in the mirror. The dress was crumpled and crushed quite flat on his broad chest, and the plaid kerchief on his head was twisted all awry.

With a few deft womanly touches she set all right again. Then rising on tip-toe she kissed him on the lips, while their reflections kissed too, like ghosts, in the mocking mirror. She looked long and earnestly into the brave brown eyes of her young husband, that met her own so lovingly that the very look was a caress—the last caress of their young lives.

Then in a passion of tears she threw herself on the couch, and Lord Edward, fearing for his manhood, turned from her without a word or look, and went slowly and sadly across the great room and down the broad stairs; the grim figure of Magan following close like the shadow of death.

On their way back to Moore's the plan of Lord Edward's flitting was arranged.

"That is the door of my garden, my lord," said Magan, as they passed a worm-eaten door in a

narrow laneway. "I will leave it open this evening, and you can slip through in the dusk, and so come to the back of the house where I will be in waiting. Come alone, it will divert suspicion."

"I fear I cannot do that. They never let me stir abroad without a bodyguard," Lord Edward answered smiling, "though this precaution is not in the least needed."

"They are quite right, quite right," Magan rejoined quickly, though there was a note of disappointment in his voice. "They cannot be too careful. Here is the turn. You see, my lord, you can come from Moore's either by Watling Street or by Dirty Lane. Which way will you take? Dirty Lane seems to me the safest."

"I will keep my choice for evening," Lord Edward replied, "and choose which ever appears least frequented at the time."

Again Magan murmured his approval of his caution.

At Moore's door they parted. Magan had urgent business to attend to, and Lord Edward's time was very precious.

"Good-bye, old friend," he said, standing within the door, "and once more thanks for your great service. I trust this good deed will be remembered to you when the history of our troublous time comes to be written."

But Magan, clasping the hand of his friend, modestly put from him all thanks for what he had done.

So they parted. At the corner of the street Magan hailed a jingle and drove straight to the house of his good friend, Francis Higgins, in Harcourt Street.

Within an hour later Higgins was closeted with his good friend, Under-Secretary Cooke, in the Castle, and the following letter was on its way by urgent messenger to Major Sirr:—

"Lord Edward will be this evening in Watling Street. Place a watch in Watling Street, two houses up from Usher's Island; another towards Queen's Bridge; a third in Island Street at the rear of the stables near Watling Street, and which leads up to Thomas Street and Dirty Lane. At one of these places Lord Edward will be found, and will have one or two with him. They may be armed. Send to Swan and Atkinson as soon as you can.

Chapter IX

HUNTED

"The friends who strive to save him,
The traitors who betray,
Now be their names remembered
Unto the latest day.
With curses for the traitors
Who dug for him a grave,
And honour for the faithful friends
Who risked their lives to save."

IT was about eight o'clock on a beautiful May evening, and the red sun was turning the broad stream of the Liffey to gold, when the huge apprentice, Gallagher, with a tobacco pipe between his teeth, came out of Moore's front door and strolled slowly down Thomas Street. He paused for a moment in indolent indecision before he took the turn that led through Watling Street to Usher's Island.

The big man lounged along, the very picture of listless indolence. None could have guessed that he carried a naked sword under his coat, with the hilt ready to his strong right hand. In slouching walk and stolid face there was no hint of the vigilance

that lurked in those sleepy eyes; the fierce excitement with which that brave heart throbbed. But the naked sword he carried under his cloak, the hilt ready to his strong right hand, was not keener or more dangerous, than this big, sleepy looking man.

A little behind Gallagher there followed at the same easy pace a group of three, two women and a man, staid and middle-aged. They walked all three together, the elder of the two women leaning on the man. Slowly the dusk of the evening was deepening into darkness. The streets were silent and deserted, for these were times when it was not safe to be late abroad.

They had got half way down the street when Gallagher's watchful glance detected vague outlines stirring in the darker gloom cast by the angle of a house that projected beyond its fellows.

He crossed carelessly, and went by within a hand's breadth of four skulking shadows that crouched closer to the wall to let him pass. Yet not so close but the burly figure of Sirr was distinguishable in the group.

Heedless of his own safety, Gallagher sprang at once out into the middle of the street, where the light was clearest, and raised a warning hand and cry to those that followed.

The cry was answered by a point-blank pistol

shot from Sirr, fired so close that Gallagher could feel the warm puff of the exploding powder on his cheek and the bullet stinging his ear-tip. Then the four men rushed on him together ; his short sword leaped out from its hiding-place, and the point, driven with the full force of that strong right arm, took Major Sirr full in the chest.

The blade struck and bent and snapped against the close chain mail the major wore ; yet so fierce was the impetus of the stroke that Sirr went headlong backwards into the kennel.

Before Gallagher could recover himself a pistol was at his body, pointed straight between the broad shoulders, the muzzle not six inches off.

But the trigger was never pressed. Agile as a wild cat, Lord Edward leaped to the rescue. His dagger rose and fell, and the man went down under the blow and lay motionless. Gallagher turned and gripped the third man of the party round the waist, pinning his sword arm to his side. With a swing of his huge shoulders the giant lifted and flung his captive across the street, and the sword, flying from his grasp, went with a crash through a window close at hand. The man himself staggered six good paces back, till his feet struck the kerbstone, and he, too, fell in a crumpled heap.

At that moment Major Sirr, staggering out of the

kennel, found his feet and voice, and ran and shouted.

Impetuous, Lord Edward would have started in pursuit, but Gallagher's strong hand restrained him.

"Back, my lord, back, for God's sake!" he whispered earnestly. "The devils are out in force to-night. Listen!"

The clatter of Sirr's hurrying feet on the pavement ceased, and at once the shouts and curses were heard of a large party close at hand.

Mrs. Moore was trembling violently and could scarcely stand, but her daughter kept her courage.

"Let us return, my lord," she cried.

"No, no," answered Lord Edward, to whom, indeed, danger was a stimulant and a steadier. "We must separate at once. Gallagher," he said, "you get the ladies home. I am the quarry those dogs hunt. I'll draw off the pursuit. Quick! quick! man"—seeing the giant hesitate—"I'm in no danger, I tell you. Murphy's house is close at hand; they know my knock. I will be safe with him."

"He's right," Gallagher whispered to the resolute girl, for Mrs. Moore was distraught with terror. "We must separate."

Even as he spoke the pursuing party showed

dimly in a double line at the corner of the street. Gallagher, facing round, ran towards them swiftly, silently, keeping well within the shadow of the houses as he ran. He was almost abreast with the party, when he turned sharp into the centre of the street and went crash through their line. Before a weapon could be used he was safe through and racing like a deer down Thomas Street. With an aimless and harmless spluttering of pistol shots, the party turned and scampered after him in hot pursuit, leaving Watling Street deserted.

"He is lost," Lord Edward cried; "he has thrown his life away."

But Miss Moore answered with a smile, "You do not know the man, my lord. He is the fleetest runner in all Dublin. They might as well hope to catch a hare in the open as catch Jack Gallagher."

So it proved. When the two women got back to their home, having left Lord Edward in safe shelter at Murphy's house close at hand, Gallagher, still panting a little from his run, welcomed them at the door.

Chapter X

TRAPPED

"Sad Erin still weeps for the hero she lost,
Brave, faithful, and noble all others above
He gave himself freely, not counting the cost,
To danger and death, for the land of his love."

NEXT morning the two women were still in a state of nervous, yet triumphant, excitement. Their breakfast was a mere pretence. They could neither eat nor drink. The tea cups clattered in the saucers as their trembling fingers touched them. Hysterical sobs and laughter tripped their words up as they recalled the stirring incidents of the fight and flight.

A sudden, sharp knock at the door set their strained nerves jumping. The next moment their friend, Counsellor Magan, came quietly into the room.

In their excitement they had forgotten all about him and his share in the night's adventure. Now his sudden appearance startled them into remembrance. He was no longer the staid and precise Counsellor Magan they had known all their lives.

His face was pale, his hair ruffled, his manner flurried, even his cravat rumpled and unstarched. Instantly the women divined the anxiety that had so shaken him out of his formal self, and their hearts went out to him in womanly sympathy.

But before they could speak a word, he broke out anxiously, "Where is Lord Edward? where is he, I say? I sat up half the night last night waiting for him and he never came. I hope in God that nothing has——"

"Lord Edward is quite safe," Mrs. Moore interposed soothingly.

"But where? Where?" he repeated, without seeming to catch the full meaning of her words.

"At Murphy's; you know Murphy's, Counsellor, in this very street, close at hand."

Then his composure came back to him, and he dropped into a seat, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

"Oh! it was terrible, Counsellor! Sirr and his men were after him; he was almost caught. I meant to have gone over to tell you about it this morning," cried kind-hearted Mrs. Moore. "I guessed how uneasy you would be. But I'm so bewildered, I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels. There, now, draw over to the table and have a bit and sup with us. I'm sure you came out without your breakfast."

The counsellor suffered himself to be easily persuaded, and ate a hearty breakfast, while the two women flowed over together with an incoherent description of last night's attack and escape.

The counsellor was specially impressed with the bravery and devotion of Gallagher, and made Mrs. Moore repeat his name twice over and describe his appearance.

"I suppose Lord Edward is quite safe with Murphy?" he said at last, when the feminine flow of words ceased for a moment. There was a faint, indescribable note of suspicion in the slow words that roused honest Mrs. Moore to protest.

"As safe as with our own selves," she cried warmly.

"There is no danger that——" Magan persisted. "I hardly like to say it, but in these times one does not know whom to trust."

"Is it Murphy you mean? Murphy to turn Judas like that! There is not a drop of spy's blood in his heart. He'd give himself and all belonging to him to the devil before he'd let a hair of Lord Edward's head come to harm."

"I'm glad to know it, very glad to know it," said the counsellor. "But one cannot help feeling uneasy; there is so much at stake and so many spies about. Every one thought that Thomas Reynolds was a true man until——"

"I only wish I could lay my ten fingers on his face," cried Mrs. Moore, breaking in on his slow talk; "but the devil will have him some day, body and soul, that's one comfort."

"We must have charity," said Counsellor Magan; "his offence is indeed hard to pardon, but God is merciful."

"I wouldn't go to heaven if he was there," cried Miss Moore with conviction. "Where's the use of a devil at all if he doesn't get Reynolds?"

At last the counsellor took his leave "to go home," he said.

But he did not go home. When he got up to Usher's Island he looked sharply up and down the empty quays, and walked briskly away in the direction of Harcourt Street.

That day had opened dull and lowering, and a little before noon it had taken to rain—a steady, heavy, dreary downpour.

All the morning Lord Edward was in the gayest of gay spirits, taking no thought of the perils that encompassed him, or of the death that approached.

About noon there came a messenger to the door who put a heavy parcel in Murphy's hands and disappeared without a word.

In an upper room, where Lord Edward was writing, Murphy and he opened the parcel

together, and found a general's uniform, dark green and gold, complete even to the braid and buttons.

To Murphy it was a sharp reminder how close at hand the fateful rising was, and stung him to more keen anxiety for his noble guest, on whom so much depended.

But the mere sight of the weapons that came with the uniform seemed to exhilarate the young soldier. He fingered them almost lovingly, half drawing the bright new blade and testing its keen edge with his thumb. Then he sent it back with a clang into the scabbard.

"Not yet," he murmured, rather to himself than to his companion. "In a fortnight more—if all goes well—I will unsheath it in the face of the enemy. Take it away, like a good fellow"—to Murphy—"the pen is my weapon just now, but there's 'metal more attractive.' I could never see a good blade yet, without my fingers longing to play with the hilt of it. Get all these things out of the way to some safe place, till there is need of them."

Laughingly Murphy gathered the uniform and weapons together, and carried them off to hide in the garret. But in five minutes or less he was back again in Lord Edward's room with a changed, frightened expression in his eyes.

"Quick! quick, my lord," he whispered under his breath, "I must get you to some safe place at once. The troops are in the street."

"Now-a-days the troops are always in the streets," Lord Edward answered, smiling back at him over his shoulder, but without rising from his desk. "But with God's help we will drive them out of the streets soon."

"They have halted for the last twenty minutes opposite Moore's house; they are marching straight here."

"It is the straight route to their barracks," Lord Edward answered again, without moving.

"My lord! my lord! for my sake, if not for your own, come with me at once. It is ruin and death to me if you are discovered."

The plea told at once, as the faithful fellow hoped it would.

Lord Edward, still smiling at what he thought to be mere idle fears, put aside his pen and papers, and followed his host silently from the room. They climbed a high steep stairs to the garret, and then a narrow broken iron step ladder, on to the roof. First up the ladder went Murphy, and, grunting with the effort, pushed back the rusty bolts and raised the heavy skylight with his shoulder. The high roof was clammy and slippery with the rain.

"Follow me," Murphy whispered anxiously, and led the way, crawling on hands and feet to the valley between two ridges of the roof, where half a dozen men could crouch concealed. "Lie close, my lord. You are quite safe there. I will come for you the moment the danger is gone by."

Curiously enough the soldiers halted almost, but not quite, opposite the door, a little nearer to the Castle.

From the garret window Murphy watched them anxiously.

Creeping cautiously down to the edge of the roof, Lord Edward looked over the raised gutter, through which the water ran gurgling. From where he lay he could not see the soldiers, though he could hear the jangling of their accoutrements and the murmur of their voices through the sullen drip, drip and gurgle of the rain. His eyes ranged over Dublin that stretched before him, the ghost of a dead city close muffled in a chill, grey winding sheet, with the gaunt shoulders of some high house, or the blurred outline of some sharp steeple, showing here and there through the mist.

Presently, the troops began to move, but they still paraded the street backwards and forwards on a narrow beat, and Murphy watched and

waited, and Lord Edward lay quite still in his cold, damp hiding-place, looking out over the cold, grey city.

So an hour passed. The fine rain gradually soaked and chilled him to the marrow of his bones. It is sad to think how far, except in moments of brisk action or keen excitement, the phases of the body dominate the mind.

A dull sinking of the heart came upon Lord Edward as he lay. Vague fears took horrid shape. The thought of failure, the fear of failure, daunted him at last. The triumph of the enemy, the utter hopeless misery of the conquered people, came vividly before him as they had never come before. Withal there raged in him like a fever a mad impatience of delay. If he could but break through the invisible net of treachery, in which the movement was on all sides entangled, and meet the enemy in the open, he had no fear for the result. But even then the fatal net was closing on him nearer and nearer. Discomforting treachery seemed to lurk almost palpable to the touch in the clammy mist and dreary rainfall. A dull despondency, a cheerless sense of his own impotence, that comes at times on the very bravest, loosened the fibres of his heart.

So he lay well into the second hour in that steady downpour, that chilled him body and spirit.

At last Murphy's head showed at the skylight, and a cautious "Hist!" came to Lord Edward's ears.

He was so wet, that the water trickled cold upon his limbs and body as he moved.

Even when he had changed his dripping clothes, and sat before a cheery fire at dinner with his host, the deadly chill was still in the marrow of his bones. He scarcely ate or drank at all, in spite of his host's pressing.

The cloth had been removed, and the decanters set upon the polished mahogany that shone cheerily in the fire and candle light, when Murphy was called away by a visitor.

Ten minutes passed slowly, and he did not return. Lord Edward toyed with his glass of port, watching the liquid shadow quiver in the shining darkness of the mahogany. Then he put the wine down untasted, drew his chair closer, and crouched over the fire. His face was flushed and his head throbbed, but the cold gripped his back, and his hands and feet were chill and clammy as half-thawed ice.

Presently, he went wearily upstairs to his bedroom, threw himself, dressed as he was, on the bed, and lay there shivering under a pile of clothes.

It seemed a long time—in reality it was but a

little while—afterwards that, half-asleep, he rather felt than heard the door open softly, and his opening eyes fell at once on the face of Major Swan, framed in the half-open doorway, and on another face he did not know, peeping over the major's shoulder.

The major, who had hoped to steal upon his victim asleep, was startled to find those watchful eyes staring steadily into his own.

"You know me, my lord?" he cried hastily, with a tremor in his voice; "it will be useless to resist."

The words were not spoken when Lord Edward leaped from his couch; his langour vanished from heart and limb, every nerve and muscle tense to face the threatening danger.

Crack! crack! Swan's double-barrelled pistol rang out, filling the small room with the noise and smoke of the explosion.

The heavy bullet caught Lord Edward on the shoulder, and stopped and staggered him for a second; the next, with a tiger leap he was upon his enemy.

Swan stumbled back a pace or so; too late to escape a dagger-cut on the arm and on the breast. Then the two men grappled in a fierce death struggle. The third, who had peeped over the major's shoulder through the door, with naked

sword-cane in his hand now dodged and leaped round the clenched foes as they writhed through the room, watching warily for the chance to thrust from behind at Lord Edward's heart. This chance soon came, but the sword's point struck a bone, and the elastic weapon bent and glanced aside, tearing the flesh.

Stung by the pain, Lord Edward flung off the major and sprang upon his new foe. One swift, upward thrust of the dripping dagger, and the wretched man went down in a bleeding heap on the floor, clutching wildly at Lord Edward as he fell.

The gallant Geraldine still kept his feet, though the blood poured from his wound, and dragged his prostrate foes, who clung desperately round his legs, half way to the door. Then a pistol barrel showed for a moment in the opening, and Major Sirr, crouching in safe shelter, took steady aim and fired. A storm of slugs shattered Lord Edward's uplifted right arm, and the dagger dropped from his nerveless fingers and stuck quivering in the floor.

Sirr moved aside from the door, and quick following on the shot a body of soldiers burst into the room and flung themselves on the wounded and disarmed rebel. He struggled fiercely to the last. By sheer weight of numbers they

overbore him, and while some, pressing their musket butts heavily against his neck and chest, held him fast to the ground, the others bound him hand and foot, straining the cords hard.

Then, half-pushed, half-carried, with the blood still streaming from his wounds, he was forced down the narrow stairs into the street, where a sedan chair waited in the centre of two hundred soldiers. Into this Lord Edward was lifted and flung like a sack, and instantly, before the few people in the street had realized what was happening, the whole party went jolting off at a hard trot for the Castle.

Chapter XI

MERCILESS

"Mercy is still reserved for private wrongs,
But the State's service is inexorable;
Nor will I have this peevish leech to stand
Betwixt me and my purpose."

LORD EDWARD lay groaning on a couch in a remote room of Dublin Castle, his hands still bound, his wounds untended, while, in an adjoining chamber, Lord Camden and Lord Clare exchanged hasty congratulations on the capture of their most dreaded foe.

"This will end the rebellion," said Lord Camden.

"This will begin it," said Lord Clare impatiently. "We must provoke the rising that we may crush it. We must march through war to peace. Surely you see that?"

But Lord Camden, as usual, shuffled and shirked the issue.

"There is no danger of a rescue?" he said feebly, evading Clare's question.

"There is danger, constant danger, every hour he is here. But there has been a man hurt; the police must claim him as their prisoner and shift him to Newgate at once."

"Newgate itself," Lord Camden objected, "will hardly hold him long if the people once learn he is there."

"Why need they learn? No one shall see him there, not even his nearest and dearest."

"But the secret cannot be kept for ever. His trial and conviction will be a long, slow business at best. Meanwhile——"

"Sirr tells me he is desperately wounded. Three days from this they may rescue a corpse."

It so chanced that at this moment Dr. Adrian, who was in attendance on one of the ladies at the Castle, came down the carpeted stairs softly as doctors will, making no sound. He had gone past the room where Lord Camden and Lord Clare were closeted, when two sentries posted at a narrow door down a long corridor attracted his attention.

"What has happened?" he asked one of the two men, who stood motionless as statues at the door with ready hands upon their weapon.

"A d——d rebel caught; that's what has happened," growled one of the soldiers. "Stand back, I tell you, or I'll put a bayonet through you."

The keen point threatened the doctor's breast scarcely an inch away.

But the other, who wore the sergeant's stripes, put the threatening weapon roughly aside.

"It's Dr. Adrian," he whispered, "you d——d fool; will you ever learn to keep a civil tongue in your head? I make no doubt he was sent to Lord Edward. Faith, he'll be the better of a doctor's hand over him. You will find the patient very wake, doctor," he said civilly as he made room for him to pass.

Dr. Adrian's face paled, and his heart beat hard, at the sudden mention of that name; but with the trained doctor's impassive manner that nothing can disturb, he walked to the side of the couch, where Lord Edward lay vainly striving to stifle the groans that the agony of his burning wounds wrung from his labouring breast.

A faint smile stirred the ashen lips of the sufferer as Dr. Adrian bent over him. He made a motion as if he would speak, but, with finger to his lips, the surgeon silently enforced silence.

His movements were soft and quick as a cat's. First he drew his chair close to the couch, and set his surgical case upon it. Then, with a crooked scissors, he cut the ragged sleeve, clammy with oozing blood, from the wounded arm and shoulder, and staunched the wounds, and laid on the lint

lightly, and tied the bandages firm, with the surgeon's educated touch.

He had his reward when he saw the strained agony soften on the haggard face. But with relief faintness came. The cheeks went ashen grey, the eyelids softly closed, but the pale lips feebly moved, and, bending close over him, the doctor caught the faint question, "Is this death?"

"No," he whispered back, "nor like to be."

"I am sorry,"—the faint speech scarce stirred the air—"there is nothing left now but to die."

Again the doctor answered cheerily, "Do not think of dying; there is no fear of that. We cannot spare you yet. A stimulant is all you need; keep your heart up. In a moment I will return."

But just outside the door the doctor came plump upon Lord Camden and Lord Clare, while the sentries stood timidly aside.

The doctor's last words had plainly been overheard, for Lord Clare answered them. "You will return here no more, Dr. Adrian," he said, with an angry frown. "You may think yourself sufficiently fortunate that you are allowed to depart."

But the doctor faced the chancellor's fierce scowl firmly.

"Lord Edward has urgent need of surgical attendance," he said.

"He shall have it."

"Here?"

Lord Clare hesitated for a moment with those clear, bright eyes searching his face, and Dr. Adrian went on impressively,—

"I have examined Lord Edward Fitzgerald carefully. At present he is in no danger; but if he be moved or neglected, I cannot answer for his life."

"Nor is it needed. Answer for yourself, sir, when called upon; it will suffice."

"My Lord Clare," Dr. Adrian persisted, "there is a heavy responsibility on you."

"And I accept it," Clare retorted sternly. "I have no foolish squeamishness when the safety of the realm is at stake. To you, sir, I would strongly counsel silence and prudence for your own safety's sake. Lord Edward has no further need of your care."

Chapter XII

TEMPTED

"On death he looked with an unflinching heart,
Death and the severance from all he loved,
And the grim grave and vague eternity.
But on the grave's brink came to tempt him one
So vile he could not know how vile he was,
Nor plumb the depths of his own infamy.
Whose sleek sly hints, though heard with loathing, seemed
To soil the listener's soul, so tortured him
With outraged honour's pangs, so wrought
On the poor captive's anguished heart that rage
Pushed reason from her seat."

THE thick walls of Newgate held gloom, and grim silence shut close in Lord Edward's fœtid prison cell—a silence made more grim by the feeble moan or muttered word that came at long interval from the squalid bed where the noble prisoner lay in feverish sleep.

The cell door opened smoothly on hinges newly oiled. A light appeared in the opening, and behind it a face, young and handsome, with smiling lips and eyes. A young figure followed. Stepping softly as a cat, and sheltering the light he carried

with transparent hands, the new-comer crossed the cell and stood by the bedside, looking down earnestly on the sleeper's face.

It seemed as if Lord Edward's sleep grew more troubled under the influence of that steady, stealthy stare. He turned restlessly from side to side, muttering and clutching at the bed-clothes in some exciting dream. Then he half raised himself in the bed, and cried in a loud voice, "For Ireland's sake!"

The sound of his own voice woke him, and, looking up, he saw Lord Castlereagh bending over him with eager eyes.

Consciousness struggled hard to find itself in the gloom and confusion of his feverish thoughts. For a moment he could not recognise his visitor or himself. Then with remembrance came gratitude; for of late Lord Castlereagh had long ago conquered Lord Edward's first antipathy by proving himself a kind friend to Pamela.

"My Lord Castlereagh!" he murmured gratefully. He strove to lift his hand to grasp his friend's, but let the poor shattered limb fall back upon the quilt with a moan of pain. "This is indeed kind; you bring me news of Pamela, I know. Is she well and safe? How has she borne this blow? and my little ones, no trouble has come to them?"

Lord Castlereagh shook his head softly, but the smile did not depart from his face.

"Poor Pamela!" he said, "poor little loving soul. She bore the shock of the evil news better than one who knows her could have hoped. But still——"

He broke off abruptly, while Lord Edward's feverish eyes searched his face.

After a pause he began again in answer to those beseeching eyes. "Pamela was at Moira House when the news was brought at night by Mr. Watson, private secretary of the Castle, who heard it at the theatre; but Lady Moira would not have your wife told until the morning." He spoke slowly, dwelling on the details.

"Yes! yes!" Lord Edward moaned impatiently, and Lord Castlereagh resumed with apparent reluctance.

"In the morning she was told—Lady Moira herself told her—of your arrest, breaking the bad news gently, and giving what hope she could."

"And Pamela?"

"She bore it wonderfully, wonderfully"—there was a curious emphasis on his repetition of the word—"she neither screamed nor fainted, as they expected. She never shed a tear, but listened in dead silence. She has scarcely spoken at all since then. Twice my wife has been to see her. She

found her as one dazed, half conscious. Even her children have lost all interest for her. To words of comfort she listens with a weak, pitiful smile, as though only half conscious of their meaning."

There was another pause, and Lord Castlereagh, watching the young husband's face closely, broke out as if on a sudden impulse,—

"The truth is often the greatest kindness, Edward. Candidly, it is feared your wife's intellect is hurt by the shock of your arrest."

The blow struck home. The poor, weakened body quivered convulsively, like an animal hard hit by shot or bullet; then he lay quite still, moaning feebly.

For a moment Castlereagh feared he had gone too far, that this was death.

He bent closer over the bed. The piteous eyes questioned him before the pale lips spoke.

"Is there no hope of seeing her even for a moment? I might——" His voice died into a moan.

"Not hope merely," Lord Castlereagh answered cheerily, "but a certainty, if you really wish it."

"If I really wish it?"

"The Government is only too anxious to be indulgent to you both."

"Can they doubt I wish it?"

"They ask you to prove it."

"To prove it! What proof is needed? What proof is possible?"

He spoke with feverish vehemence.

"My dear lord," the other said, calmly as ever, "you must not excite yourself; excitement is dangerous for you. It was your impetuous temper—forgive me for saying so—that brought both you and poor Pamela to this pitiable position. It is your cool judgment that must save you."

"Save me?" Lord Edward asked with sudden and suspicious calmness; "how?"

"You must recognise that the cause in which you have unhappily embarked is lost — lost beyond hope of redemption."

"Not so, by Heaven!" the wounded hero answered. "God's justice and mercy will not have it so. While Ireland is Ireland the cause survives."

"Be it so," Castlereagh rejoined with a slight shrug of his shoulders, impatient, contemptuous; "the cause survives if you will have it so. But this, at least, is plain: your power to aid it is gone for ever. Then let me entreat of you," he continued, self-charmed by the soft, persuasive power of his own voice, "to bury the dead past, and live for the new and happy life that opens before you."

"I have no hope in life, no wish to live," Lord Edward said. He spoke quietly, but there was a subtle change in his voice, a faint dawning of suspicion which his visitor failed to catch.

"Do not say so," he eagerly exclaimed; "never believe it. Life is still long before you, and bright with love and honour. It is for yourself to choose. You can return, if you will, to the wife who loves you so tenderly that wounded love has hurt her reason; to the little ones who need a father's care. Your place in the army will be restored to you, your rapid promotion assured. You know how highly Pitt holds your military talents. There is no place, even the highest, to which you may not aspire, if——"

"Yes," said Lord Edward, still very quietly, "if?"

"You will be true to the Government of your king."

"And false to my country and my own honour?"

"Your honour, my lord, is in loyalty. The king is the source of all honour in this realm, and the king will prove his gratitude. Your name can never be called in question," he continued more eagerly, deceived by Lord Edward's

silence; "even by the rebels; no man amongst them need ever know."

"Know what, my Lord Castlereagh? Enough of hints and innuendoes; speak out plainly what you mean."

"That you have given earnest of your loyalty; that you have helped to crush the rebellion you had helped to raise."

In his eagerness Lord Castlereagh bent over the couch, and Lord Edward, with a sudden gust of rage, struck the tempter full in the face with his poor maimed hand.

"Oh God!" he groaned, "for a weapon and a minute's strength to use it. I am shamed to the soul to think such words were spoken to a Geraldine and the speaker lives. Get you gone, you smiling dabbler in the slime of treachery. You convenience of tyrants; you pander of spies. The mere sight of you is poison to me."

But Lord Castlereagh only stepped back two paces from the bedside, and stood still with arms loosely folded. There was a red mark on his cheek where the maimed hand struck it; but eyes and lips were still smiling.

"Be not too hasty, my lord," he said in his even, pleasant voice, no tone or syllable astray; "these mock heroics will not serve your turn. You have no hard choice to make between a life

of happiness and honour, and a sudden and shameful death. You hear that sound?"

The cell was close to the front wall of the prison, where the scaffold and gallows stood. Through the door which Lord Castlereagh had left open when he entered there came the muffled distant sound of many feet trampling on the boards; then a murmur, low at first, but gradually swelling into a dull roar. Presently voices could be distinguished in coarse jests and laughter There was a moment's pause; then words came, loud, coarse, and brutal.

"Hurry up with the dancing-master, if ye plaze." A shout of savage laughter followed from the crowd of soldiers gathered round the scaffold under the gallows.

A long pause followed,— longer and more ominous than before,—and the two men listening in the prison cell held their breaths, for they knew that death was close at hand, and coming closer.

In that dead silence they heard, or thought they heard, the drawing of a bolt and the creaking of timber under a sudden strain.

Then the wild shout broke out again, and again repeated, "The rope has slipped!" "He's alive! he's alive!" "Cut him down!" and the answering shout of a single voice, loud and

brutal, "Stand clear; I'll soon put him out of pain!" A musket's thundering report killed all other sounds for a second. The same coarse voice spoke again, "He gave more trouble than he's worth; d——n him, he's dead at last."

"The patriot's epitaph," said Lord Castlereagh softly, as if to himself. Though the words were meant for Lord Edward he did not hear them.

He had listened with every nerve upon the strain while the unseen tragedy was enacted, while a comrade was brutally done to death only a few yards away. The tears were streaming from his eyes, his breast heaved with convulsive sobs. "God pity him," he murmured; "God pity me, too, and all who go with me."

His eyes lit on Lord Castlereagh's smiling face, and a paroxysm of mad fury seized him. "Go!" he shouted wildly, "before the curse of a dying man blasts you. You devil! do you still defy me? Go!"

It was a miracle. He leaped like a whole man from his bed, and with fiercely gripping hands threw himself at the throat of Lord Castlereagh. But in that same instant his strength failed utterly, and he went headlong in a senseless heap to the ground.

Letting him lie as he fell, Lord Castlereagh fled panic-stricken from the cell.

"He is mad—raving mad!" he whispered breathlessly to Lord Clare, who waited in the governor's room near at hand for his news.

Very briefly he told what had passed between Lord Edward and himself, ending with the last furious outburst. He closed as he begun, "The man is mad, furiously, dangerously mad."

"Then we must have a keeper for him," Clare answered with a grim smile, "a strong, capable, reliable fellow used to dealing with lunatics Neither the soldiers nor the warders are to be wholly trusted in an emergency, and there are ugly rumours abroad of an intended rescue. I will send a special note to the asylum. The superintendent is an intelligent fellow; he will know how to choose my man. Lord Edward has made his choice and must abide by it."

Chapter XIII

FREE

"The Geraldines, the Geraldines; and are there any fears
Within those sons of conquerors for full a thousand years?
Can treason spring from out a soul bedewed with martyr's blood?
Or has that grown a purling brook which long rushed down a flood?
By Desmond swept by sword and fire; by clan and keep laid low
By Silken Thomas and his kin; by gallant Edward; no,
The forms of centuries rise up, and in the Irish line
Command their sons to take the post that fits the Geraldine."

AT the very moment that Lord Edward listened with fast beating heart to the ghastly tragedy played out to the death a few yards away from the cell where he lay helpless, two chairmen, tall and strong, as became their work, loitered slowly, seemingly in quest of an odd job, round the entrance of Newgate. They had passed and repassed, carrying a sedan-chair, several times during the day, sometimes with a fare and sometimes without.

Evening was falling, and the streets close round the prison were quiet, almost suspiciously quiet. But away in the Liberties the silk weavers and the butchers from Ormond Quay gathered and chatted together in small companies; their ancient feud apparently laid aside in some common purpose that absorbed them wholly.

The two chairmen set the empty sedan-chair they carried down in a sheltered place close to the prison door, and seated themselves lazily on the long projecting handles.

The high, thick walls shut the scaffold and gallows and all around it from their sight and hearing, and the stir and noise of the execution, which Lord Edward in his cell close at hand heard with such horrible distinctness, came to them only in a faint, intermittent murmur, till at last the musket's shot, that closed the tragedy, rang loud in their startled ears.

The younger of the two chairmen started feverishly to his feet.

"This is too horrible!" he said; but even in his excitement his cautious voice did not rise above a whisper. "I cannot stand it much longer, Christy. I dread some devil's work behind those walls. I'd give my right hand for one look at him, one word from him; the suspense is intolerable!"

"Patience, patience," Christy Culkin muttered soothingly, his rough face and voice full of sympathy; "our plans are well laid and won't fail. The boys are gathering fast, brave and ready. The prison cannot hold him from their hands; to-night, please God, he'll be free as air."

"If he still lives; but I fear their devilish treachery. Dr. Adrian has told me neglect or excitement would kill him as certainly as steel or poison. They are greedy for his death. If I could only find some way to come to him!"

"Patience," Christy Culkin again answered anxiously. "The danger would be too great. Oh, I don't mean for yourself, but for him. We are playing for his life—for more than his life. We must not lose a chance; foolhardiness would be the ruination of us all. For the Lord's sake keep yourself quiet and aizy till you're called on. A few hours more won't be long goin' by, and then——"

"But," Maurice Blake persisted, "I might be able to help him—to warn him."

"Hist!" interrupted Christy sharply, with warning fingers to his lips.

At that moment Lord Clare's messenger to the lunatic asylum glided like a shadow from the prison door and passed within a yard of them.

"Chair, yer honner? chair?" cried Christy, and laid a detaining hand upon the man's arm.

The man was so startled he did not catch the meaning of the words and had no voice to answer.

"Chair, yer honner?" Christy persisted in his most persuasive tones.

The fellow found his tongue suddenly.

"D——n you, you rascal—how dare you touch me. To the devil with you and your chair." Then after a second pause, "Yes, I'll have a chair. It's the Government business I'm on, and I'll make the Government pay for it." The last few words were muttered to himself, yet not so low but Christy's keen ears caught their meaning. "Look alive there!" he shouted to his companion, "and open the door for his honner. Where to, yer honner?" with hat in hand at the door as the messenger stepped into the chair.

"To the Richmond Lunatic Asylum, as quick as you can go," the other answered, slamming the door superciliously in his face; and the chair went off with its bearers at a quick trot through the darkening street.

"You have come in good time," said Lord Clare, half an hour later, very graciously to the keeper who handed him a letter from the Medical Superintendent of the asylum.

"I borrowed a horse on the way," the man answered shortly, but civilly.

"From the enemy, I hope," said Lord Clare with his grim smile.

"Yes, my lord, from the enemy."

Lord Clare read the note. "Your master writes you are strong, resolute, and not too tender-hearted?"

The man nodded without speaking.

He was a stalwart fellow in ill-fitting asylum uniform, whose tightness made his muscle more apparent. Good looking, too, but with an angry scowl and a dangerous light in his blue eyes that Lord Clare noted approvingly.

"The patient is violent," he said, "even dangerous; have you brought a strait waistcoat should it be required?"

The man showed it ready in his hand.

"That's right. I trust you may not have occasion to use it, but it is well to come prepared. One word more; keep guard on your eyes, ears, and tongue. The less you hear and see — and above all the less you speak—the better for yourself. You will be shown to your patient's cell and left with him alone."

Lord Edward was still in a very fever of excitement, that threatened both his reason and his life, when his cell door was flung open by a turn-

key, a bitter Orangeman—for that reason chosen for this special duty.

"The man from the madhouse to look after your lordship," the fellow shouted insolently, with a hoarse laugh at his own humour.

But the laugh was cut short in the middle, for the man from the madhouse had jerked him so sharply under the chin with his shut fist, that he brought his jaws together with a snap like a rat trap.

The fellow turned fiercely on his aggressor with a growl of rage and pain.

But "the man from the madhouse" was by no means an inviting opponent to tackle, and he was moreover plainly in a towering rage. Laying a heavy hand on the shoulder of the turnkey he whispered, "Silence, you scoundrel. If you speak one word more, I'll first beat you to a jelly and then report you to Lord Clare."

The mere mention of that terrible name was enough. The fellow shrank quite crestfallen from the cell.

The man from the madhouse locked the heavy door carefully behind him. Then he moved softly, carrying a lamp with him, towards the rude bed, whence the patient watched him with feverish and dilated eyes.

As he came close, Lord Edward made a frantic effort to rise. But the man's hands—strong, but

very gentle hands—held him down. A kindly face bent over him as he lay, and a familiar voice, broken by grief and pity, whispered, "Edward, don't you know me?"

"You, Maurice! you here! I am mad to think so; it is impossible."

"But it is true."

"How came you here? You risk your life for me, Maurice, and risk it to no purpose. How in God's name came you here?"

"That is of no consequence. Well, well," for the other still eyed him curiously, only half convinced, "it is a very short story. Christy and myself, disguised as chairmen, carried Lord Clare's messenger to the lunatic asylum for a keeper to take charge of you. We carried the keeper back—half way. Then I relieved him of his uniform and credentials, and left him in safe keeping, and came on in his stead. There was no touch of danger in the business, Edward. But it is enough that I *have* come, and come with good news. Our plan for your rescue is laid beyond the fear of failure. The boys are ready and waiting for the word. To-night Newgate will be in our hands and you will be free."

"Yes," Lord Edward repeated feebly with a sad smile upon his lips, "to-night I shall be free. It is too late, Maurice," he added softly; "you have come quickly, but yet you have come too late."

He was quite calm now. Consciousness and courage came back to him at the touch of that familiar hand, the tone of that familiar voice. "For me there is no rescue but Death, and he is already on his way."

Despair struck chill to Maurice Blake's heart as he looked and listened. On the drawn and haggard face inevitable death had indeed set its mark. He tried to utter some words of hope or comfort, but they died tremblingly on his lips.

Lord Edward's eyes looked up at him bravely, almost cheerfully. "It's no use, Maurice, you cannot cheat me; you cannot cheat yourself with hope. My hour is come. You will say good-bye from me to my wife and little ones. It is very hard to part without a word with them." His voice for a moment faltered, but instantly it took a firmer tone. "My friend, we knew only too well how much we hazarded in this great game for liberty. Our lives were the stakes, and I will not whine that the forfeit must be paid."

"Your country needs you still; never more sorely," Maurice cried imploringly, as if life or death were his to choose.

"Patience, patience," cried the dying man consolingly; "no man is indispensable. Many worthier leaders remain. I die in the consoling hope that the great cause, the good cause for which my life

and better lives than mine are given, will triumph in the end. I am sorry you are come, Maurice, yet glad. The risk is very great, and yours is not a life to be lightly ventured. But it is good to see a friend's face in an hour like this, that tries the best of us. Come closer, Maurice; there is a word I would say to you before we part."

There was a step in the passage and a knock at the cell door; then followed the sound of voices speaking softly, a woman's tones distinct amongst them. At the sound Lord Edward strove to raise himself in the bed, the light of wonder and a glad expectation shining in his eyes.

Maurice Blake stepped at once to the door, turned the key in the lock, and let the door swing open, then stepped quietly back into the shadow.

Into the circle of light that streamed from the lamp in his hand a lady entered darkly veiled, leaning on the arm of a young man, whom, so close was the resemblance, Blake recognised at a single glance as Lord Edward's brother.

They went straight to the bedside, quickly, eagerly; but when the lady saw the ghastly change in that loved face she faltered, and would have fallen but the man's arm held her.

"Oh, Edward! dearest Edward!" she cried passionately, casting aside her veil and throwing herself on her knees beside the bed, while she clasped

the thin white hands that lay limp on the coarse coverlet. "You know me—don't you know me?"

Lord Edward uttered a feeble cry of delight, with his eyes intent on her face till the welling tears blinded them.

"My own dearest sister!" he murmured, "it was good of you to come, and Henry too; dear Henry, I have longed and prayed, but hardly hoped for this."

"Day and night," she said, in a voice broken with weeping, "we have besieged them with entreaties for leave to see you, if only for a moment."

"It is not an hour ago," Lord Henry added, "since at last I wrung reluctant consent from Camden."

"When my death was quite safe," Lord Edward said softly; "no, no, you must not grieve for me. Dying in the good cause for which I lived I have no fear of death. It is best so; best for me and for those I love. You would not have me live a little longer only to die upon the scaffold. There; there; I will speak no more of this. Tell me of Pamela and the little ones; the dear, dear little ones whom I shall never see again on this side of the grave."

In tones which they strove to make cheerful for his sake, they told him trivial tidings and tender messages from home. His soul, hovering on the

brink of the Great Unknown, was comforted. Even while he shivered at the vague void that yawned in darkness beyond the limits of familiar life, and with failing senses drifted swiftly towards oblivion, the light of love shone bright around and cheered him on his way. In that last dismal hour his heart yearned to be assured of the fond remembrance upon earth which is the sole bond between the living and the dead, and they fed his hope with grief and tears and fervent promises.

So the time sped in loving words and passionate embracing, till the jailer, even his rough nature softened by the pathos of the scene, stole softly behind Lord Henry and touched him upon the shoulder.

"Time is up, my lord," he whispered and waited. Then brother and sister kissed the dying man for the last time upon the lips, and left him perforce to die alone, but with the comfort they brought still warm at his heart.

For a few moments he lay silent, quite motionless with closed eyes, and Maurice Blake, watching from the shadow where he stood, feared by stir or sound to intrude upon the sanctity of his dying thoughts.

Slowly the eyes opened at last, and the thin white hand, fluttering feebly as a leaf in a light wind, beckoned Blake to his side.

"I am dying, Maurice," he said softly, and with a faint smile as of wonder at his own weakness, "and I am afraid. I never feared where death threatened in action, but this is different; this lying here helpless, watching, waiting for the hour without strength or hope. It is an awful passing, Maurice, through the dark gate from the known to the unknown. I loved my life well and grieve to leave it."

He saw Blake's face bent over him in a very agony of pity, and ceased of a sudden.

"It was not of myself I meant to speak," he began again in a changed voice in which was no trace of fear. "I am dying for Ireland, and I will not grieve if by life or death I have brought her one step nearer to liberty. I may not see it, Maurice, nor perhaps may you, yet in God's good time it will come. Only I tremble to think of the sufferings that may come before it. Patience is needed now; above all things patience."

"The time for patience has gone by," Maurice answered vehemently, his anger hot in him.

But Lord Edward's feeble voice spoke again with piteous entreaty. "Do not say so; do not think so, you who have so often counselled me to patience. Do not turn your back on your own good counsel now that I own its prudence. I have had time for cool thought here. Our enemies—I should not

speak so, for I am at emnity with no man now; our people's enemies—want a rising. My capture was a device to provoke it. They would fain crush the movement in its naked and unarmed infancy. I repeat, Maurice, if you must throw away the scabbard, let it be at your own time, not theirs. I want your promise that you will strive your hardest to hold our people back. It will be no easy task, I know."

"I fear it is no longer possible. In Wexford they are goading the peasantry to rebellion with the cunning and cruelty of devils."

"But you will do your best?" the feeble voice persisted. "You promise me you will do your best?"

"I promise."

"And I trust you, Maurice." The eyes were still bright and wistful, but the voice so low that Maurice Blake seemed rather to see than hear his name upon the trembling lips. He bent over the bed.

"Come closer," the dying voice whispered, so faintly the words scarce stirred the air. "Closer still. Give me your hand; stand where I can see your face, and hold my hand tight. I want to keep touch to the last with the life I am leaving, that the passage may seem shorter to the next."

The voice failed, fading away into silence.

Maurice saw the light die out of the eyes as the death-film covered their brightness. The hands he clasped grew icy cold. Leaning closer still, he thought he heard the word "Ireland" in the last fluttering breath from those pale lips. So that brave soul passed to the Unknown, where hope and love must follow tremblingly.

Chapter XIV

MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

"Then flung the youth his naked hand against the shearing sword;
Then sprung the mother on the brand with which her son was gored;
Then sank the grandsire on the floor, his grandbabes clutching wild;
Then fled the maiden moaning, faint, and nestled with the child."

"IT'S no use preaching peace," growled Christy Culkin; "flesh and blood cannot stand it. It's enough to make the dead rise from their graves, let alone the living. Besides," he went on—for Maurice Blake, gazing sadly out on the fair, moonlit scene, answered nothing to his grumblings—"besides, the yeos are sazing the arms, pikes, and the like, which is all the poor boys has to depend on, and then quietly killing them off at their aize, all as one as sheep in a slaughter-house."

"But a rising would mean wholesale slaughter," Maurice answered at last. "The people, scattered and distracted, without arms or leaders, could make no head against the soldiers."

"They cannot stand the devilment that's in it for ever."

"One way or the other—it is a terrible choice."

"Best die fighting anyhow, if die we must," Christy answered grimly, and Maurice, finding no answer, lapsed again into troubled silence.

They had come a long night and day's journey from Dublin into Wexford, and their souls were sickened by the things they had seen by the way. It was as if a host of devils had gone over the country before them. Not twenty miles from Dublin they passed through the blackened ruins of little hamlets, still smoking from recent fire; the doorways cumbered with the half-charred corpses of men, women, and children, shot or stabbed to death in their frantic efforts to escape the flames.

Everywhere was silence and desolation, for the frightened people had fled for shelter to the woods and mountains.

Foot-sore and heart-sore, they had rested now at the edge of a wooded slope that looked wide over a fair, moonlit landscape in hilly Wexford. Just a little while before they had come upon the mute and ghastly witnesses of a scene that had fired Christy's calm blood and stirred him to this unwonted speech.

On a peaceful country laneway, where the shadows of the hedge-row, black in the moonlight, lay like intricate lace-work on the ground, and the night air was faint with the scent of the wild flowers, they stumbled suddenly on the corpse of a young woman, with her baby in her arms, both newly slain; so newly that the blood, still dripping from the open wound in the child's throat, made a broadening black stain on the bosom of the dead mother.

Scarcely twenty yards further on three yeomen were stretched stark dead, staring at the moon, with a ghastly pike thrust through side or breast; and beyond them, where the ground was torn by a fierce struggle, the body of a young peasant lay, riddled with bullets and bayonets. His dead face was savagely beaten by musket butts out of all human resemblance, but his right hand still grasped a pike, whose broad blade, dim and sticky with new-shed blood, told its own story of vengeance on the murderers of his wife and child.

It was indeed hard to realize, when all nature slept in the holy stillness of a midsummer's night, that this calm and lovely scene was in truth a hell of man's making. A light wind from the South made leaves and shadows quiver in the moonlight, blowing coolly on the fevered faces and hot, dry eyes of those lonely watchers. All round, the land

lay naked in the white light, peaceful and beautiful as a dream of Heaven. But far out, the wide curve of the horizon's rim was broken with blotches of dusky red, and each blotch they knew was the devil's bonfire—a burning homestead. Brighter and brighter those blotches grew with the mounting flames, and vague sounds of horror, savage shouts and shrieks of pain came faintly to their ears on the breath of the soft South wind.

Then of a sudden, nearer, though still distant, a strange sound broke out in which all else was lost. At first there was the trampling of feet and the clank of weapons and the murmur of voices. Then, clear and distinct, a whistling sound—swish, swish, swish—like the beating of wild fowls' wings to the fowler's watchful ears by the water side on a still, frosty night. Blake, whose hearing was keen as a hunted hare's, heard, or thought he heard, a faint moaning that filled the intercesses of this strange sound.

Even while they listened, straining their eyes in vain in the direction of the sound, the moonlight faded slowly from the sky, and the grey dawn stole like a ghost upon the world. The chill sky warmed from grey to white, from white to rose, from rose to flame colour. Then suddenly the red sun's edge showed over the hill-tops, and the waking birds in the branches overhead twittered

their welcome. Another dangerous day was upon them.

"Come," Blake said, and without a word more they started on their journey, plunging deeper into the close shelter of the woods, but still heading towards the quarter whence the strange sounds had come during the night. Both men were armed to the teeth, and Blake carried, flung over his shoulder, a powerful field-glass, that had served him well in many a hunting and scouting expedition in the New World. They were bound for the town of Wexford, there to meet the leaders of the movement and convey to them Lord Edward's dying counsel of patience.

They walked nigh a mile with eyes and ears alert, yet saw or heard nothing. Through all that wide region, from which the people had fled in terror of their lives, leaving only the dead behind, was silence and desolation.

Crossing an abrupt ridge, narrow and steep as a house-roof, that completely closed the view of the further side, they came with startling suddenness on a fairy-like dell hid in the heart of the hills.

A little stream leaping down the hillside, with the red glow of the rising sun on its water, found for itself in the valley, a close veil of green moss and mantling shrubs, and ran with a cool, pleasant tinkling through the woods. A field of standing

corn, the green ears just touched with gold, the long stalk rustling in shifting, shadowy waves as the wind went over it, ran in a sharp angle close up to the wood's edge. Beyond the corn a stretch of green pasture lay, and in its centre a huge hawthorn, stretching broad boughs, stood alone.

But the campaigners' quick eyes found traces of man's marring hand upon this peaceful scene. Close to the wood's edge there were the marks of a camping-place, recently deserted. The corn was torn up and trampled down with feet and hoofs, and scattered broadcast over the ground. At the further edge of the glen great volumes of smoke rose sluggishly against the pure opal of the morning sky, and through the broken masses of the smoke they caught a glimpse of the sharp gables of a ruined homestead.

A broad trampled track right through the standing corn led them to the solitary hawthorn. All round the tree the lush grass was trampled and torn, and here and there the brown earth showed. From a broad branch that stretched out scarcely a yard above their heads, the bark was stripped away in white patches. Stooping down, Christy touched the trampled grass with his hand and brought it up clammy with new-spilled blood. Then the full meaning of the strange sounds they

had heard during the night came suddenly to both at once.

"The devils! the born devils!" Christy growled. "They have been flogging some poor wretch all through the night; flogging him to death, most like."

Maurice searched the empty field with keen eyes. "What have they done with the man?" he said.

"Or the corpse!" Christy muttered.

From long sojourn in the woods the Red Indian's trail-finding instinct was keen in both. Beyond the trampled circle round the tree's trunk there was a slight break in the grass, and a faint line stretched back towards the wood as if some animal had crawled through. They followed cautiously. Here and there a smear of blood on the bent blades of grass told them they were on the right track. In the corn-field the trail was easy to find, but at the wood's edge it taxed their skill and patience. Through the thick underwood they pushed slowly, till they came to where the ground cleared and tree-trunks stood apart, though the green shade was close overhead and the tinkling stream widened to a glassy pool, with velvet moss upon the margin.

There the mutilated body of the tortured wretch lay motionless, seemingly dead. Right at the pool's brim the body was stretched, naked to the

waist, all red and raw with weltering bruises—a miserable sight. The face was hanging over the pool, and slowly-dripping blood had curdled in thin red lines—like the veins in marble—in the clear water below.

A quick shiver ran through the body at the sound of approaching footsteps.

"He is still alive," Blake whispered, while slowly and painfully a pale, blood-smeared face was turned towards them.

"Friends! friends!" Blake called out eagerly in answer to the abject terror of those staring eyes. The passion of pity in his voice calmed the poor wretch's fear in a moment.

"A little water," he feebly moaned piteously, for the pool's edge was steep, and the tantalizing coolness lay just beyond the reach of his parched lips.

Again and again he drank, with an eagerness that told how fierce must have been the longing that drew him to the pool's brink, how horrible the agony of that tantalizing thirst.

But when they would have raised him from the ground, he moaned out a pitiful prayer to let him lie.

"I am dying," he whispered, "I want to die. They burned my house down last night, and killed my wife and child in cold blood as they ran from the flames. I begged them to kill me too, but I had

stabbed their sergeant with a pitchfork when he struck my wife down, and they were wild for revenge. My death wasn't enough for them; they were maddened to see the big strong brute lying flat on his back with the prongs of the fork through his breast."

Even then a grim delight at the remembrance made itself felt in the faltering voice of the dying man.

"They dragged me across the fields and tied me to the hawthorn there yonder in the pasture land, grumbling all the time that they had no pitch cap with them for the d——d Papish croppy.

"But a man they called Tom the Devil, a man with a great hooked nose and a mouth like the cut of a knife, cried out he'd fix me up for them.

"The moonlight was bright as day, and I could see his face as he spoke plainer than I see yours now. Faith, it was no lie to call him 'the devil.' There's ne'er a devil in Hell that would take more delight in his wicked work. He rubbed my head between his hands with damp gunpowder, that stuck like putty, and when it dried a bit set fire to it."

The wretch writhed again at the bare remembrance of the agony he had endured. Looking more closely they saw that his head was covered with grey ashes, through which the scalp showed, wrinkled and cracked with dry white blisters.

"Then," the faint voice went on, "when I came back out of the faint, they flogged me; taking turns at it through the night, to make me tell who had arms hid. But I knew of ne'er a wan, and with God's blessing I'd have held my tongue if I did itself. Just at daybreak they cut me down, and I fell and lay in a heap on the ground. One soldier with a drop of pity in him would have put his bayonet through me as I lay, but the captain held him back.

"'Let the dog be,' he said; 'let him take his own time dying. It would be a pity to hurry him.'

"With that they left me. I was burning with the drought. All the pain I had was nothing to that.

"The cool music of the water calling from the woods seemed to put a mad kind of life in me. One of my legs was broken. As God is my judge, I never knew it till I tried to stand and fell again. I suppose a bullet did that at the burning. But with God's help I crawled all the way, dragging the leg after me till I came to the pool's brink. There I saw the water down forninst me, and I couldn't reach it. Cool and fresh it was, but I could not reach it; I couldn't reach it." His voice broke into a kind of scream, then died away to a low moaning sound.

"Water!" he whispered presently, and again they

held a full cup to his lips, and with a deep sigh of pleasure he drained it to the bottom. After that he lay for a few moments quite still, breathing quickly.

"There was something I wanted to say to you before I died," he began again. "What was it? Good Lord! what was it? Yes, I remember now. They are making straight for Father Murphy's—him that was always a true friend of the people, and is with them heart and soul in the good cause, though it's preaching patience he does be of late. The yeomen are death on him altogether. They took great delight in telling before me, one to the other, the black deeds they were on for, and boasted how they meant to catch the d——d rebelly Papish in his hole and burn the masshouse over his head, and him inside of it. If you could give him word of their coming, it would be the best day's work ever you did. It would be my poor soul's passport to Heaven to have a hand in it."

"But you yourself?" Maurice began, "we can't leave you here."

"Never mind me," the dying man cried with strange energy, "what's the like of me in comparison with the saving of God's priest? If you ——" The collapse came suddenly. A shiver ran through the mutilated body, and the words were lost in a hoarse rattle in his throat.

"But we don't know Father Murphy," Blake persisted, bending close over that he might hear. "We don't know the way to him."

He spoke to deaf ears. Death had come, a merciful relief to agony.

Chapter XV

WITH HIS NECK IN THE HALTER

"Your swords they may clatter, your carbines go bang,
But if you want hanging, it's yourselves you must hang."

"THERE is no time for buryin'," said Christy on his knees beside the dead man. "The corpses are so thick on the country side that one more doesn't count. There's bare space for a prayer for his soul's repose, and that a short one. But sure the good Lord won't be hard on a cratur that put his purgatory over him in this world. It's the livin' is to be thought of now, not the dead, seein' the times that are in it."

"The poor fellow's own last words are to be thought of," Blake answered. "At all hazards Father Murphy must be warned."

"But how?" asked Christy. "We don't know in the least who he is, and where he is."

"We must find those ruffians' trail, catch up on them if we can, and take chance for the rest. They know tne road and we don't."

It was an easy task to find the trail; to catch up on the mounted party, with their hour's start, was not so easy. But the track wound in and out between woods and dells, and the pursuers on foot were able to cut off the angles by short cuts impossible for horsemen.

Still it was weary work; and though Maurice thought he could tell by the hoof-marks, as now and again they came directly on the track, that they were slowly gaining, yet strain their eyes as they might they could catch never a glimpse of the horsemen.

"Stoop!" Blake whispered, and laid his hand suddenly on his companion's arm, as they reached the topmost curve of a hill that gave a wider landscape to their view. "Look there! there to the right, not a quarter of a mile; they have halted; they are busy about something."

"What devilment are they up to now?" Christy muttered, while Blake quietly adjusted his field glass to focus.

"They have caught some poor wretch, and are going to hang him," he cried excitedly. "One of the soldiers is in the tree fastening the rope. They have hoisted their victim upon a barrel. I can see the man standing beside him fit the noose to his neck. The wretched creature makes no resistance at all. He goes to his death like a log.

Though his back is turned to me, I seem somehow to know the figure of the man."

Again he adjusted his glass, and the figure stood out nearer and clearer than before. "Oh! they have gagged and bound the poor wretch; I can see the cords plainly. My God! it's terrible to look on at this butchering and do nothing."

"Shoot," Christy whispered earnestly, and he reached his rifle towards him. "I have seen you pot bears at longer range with this same gun."

Maurice stretched one hand back for the rifle, with his eyes still to the glass.

Then he closed the glass suddenly, and flung it on the grass, grasping the gun with both hands.

"My God!" he cried. "I can see his face at last; it's poor Thady himself they are murdering."

Like a darting snake the long rifle barrel slid without a sound over the sharp neck of grey rock in front, and rested. Quick eyes glanced along the sights. The tiny bright bead steadied itself for a moment, motionless as the grey rock on which it rested, in the very centre of the hangman's body on the tree. Then sharp and sudden the report rang out. Through the smoke of the discharge Blake could see dimly the man topple over and come tumbling to the ground.

Christy's gun answered like an echo, and a

man in the nearest group under the tree threw up his arm and cried out.

The dismounted yeomen leaped at once to their horses, and paused irresolutely with eyes fixed on the smoke that rolled slowly towards them down the slope.

Meanwhile, Christy crawled rapidly in their direction, still under cover of the ridge of rock. He plucked a small green flag from his bosom, tied it to his rifle barrel, and lifted it high in the air.

"Fire!" he shouted to Blake, who had reloaded with a huntsman's rapidity, ramming powder and ball down the muzzle almost as quickly as a cartridge is dropped into a breech loader. Again the deadly rifle rang out, and a man slid from the saddle and fell head downwards, one foot still entangled in the stirrup.

It was enough. That third fatal shot and the sight of the green flag waving defiantly turned surprise into panic. The eighteen horsemen fled with one accord, their faces bent close over their horses' manes, their spurs buried in the poor brutes' sides.

Then Christy's eyes went back to the rope, and found a man dangling at the end of it. The figure he saw swung round and round violently, the feet only a few inches from the ground.

"My God! they've hung him in spite of their hurry," he shouted, flinging down his rifle and starting to run.

"Easy there!" Blake cried out, with his eyes to the field-glass. "It's not Thady, but his assistant hangman that's on the rope, and he's caught by the hand and not the neck."

"By gor you're right," Christy answered, leisurely picking up his gun again; "we may take our own time; a little gentle exercise will do the boy no harm."

"But Thady, poor Thady, you forget him," Blake answered, striding down the hill at a great rate, with Christy close at his heels.

The man dangling from the rope as he saw them come struggled more violently than before, till he spun round like meat on a roasting-jack.

Poor Thady, with hands and feet tight bound, had been flung like a log from the falling barrel, and had writhed and rolled away a score of paces into the thick grass, where he lay quite still.

As Christy's hand came suddenly on his shoulder a shudder ran through his slender frame. But the untamed spirit never quailed.

"Ould Ireland for ever!" he cried, his voice half-choked by the long grass, in which he lay

face downwards. Then every muscle stiffened to meet the bayonet thrust that was to answer the rebel cry.

But Christy's keen knife slit the rope at wrist and ankle, and, with a single bound, the agile creature leaped to his feet. A wild, mad light blazed into his blue eyes, as they lit on the dangling figure at the rope's end.

"Begor! they have hanged me after all!" he shouted, "Thady O'Flynn, me poor boy, and well it agrees with you, and no pain in it at all, at all. Bedad, an' that was a brave caper all out," as the dangling figure twisted and swung. "But meself could do as good, without asking ere a rope to help me."

He flung arms and legs into the air, and danced in ghastly mockery of the dangling wretch, who shrank from those waving limbs and blazing eyes, shrinking with terror.

Christy watched the sport with a grim smile on his weatherbeaten face.

But Maurice Blake's sword flashed through the taut rope, and let the dangling wretch drop.

The man's feet were hardly steady on the ground when he fled with incredible swiftness, fear lending him wings. But the fleetest feet in all Ireland were after him. He had not gone fifty yards when the toe of Thady's ragged boot

struck his uplifted heel, and he went out on his head with a crash, and lay like a stone.

"Serves you right," Thady muttered; "that wouldn't wait for the rest of me. But I hope I haven't hurt meself——"

He knelt anxiously beside the prostrate figure, and peered into the unconscious face.

"Bedad, that's a quare thing too," he muttered; "it isn't meself that's in it at all, at all, but that divil Cassidy that was helping to hang me."

He glanced cautiously round, and the wild, mad light died out of his eyes as memory came slowly back.

The first look at Maurice Blake, who had come close up, seemed to sober him instantly.

He stood silent and dazed, like one just awakened from a bad dream and not sure yet if it be dream or no.

"Maurice asthore, machree," he sobbed out at last, catching his hand and kissing it; "is that yourself or only your ghost?"

"Myself, Thady, in flesh and blood. Steady yourself, my poor fellow. You have had a narrow escape, narrow enough to turn any man's brain; but you are quite safe now. You know me; you know Christy here?"

"Faith! it's good warrant I have for that same! Easy now; don't hurry me. The sense is

coming back, as a hare, that was frightened out of her form, creeps home when the danger is gone by.

"It was a silly way I was caught. They came on me suddenly, and I made for the woods, running like a redshank. I was near in when James Cassidy roars out 'Thadying' meself at the top of his voice. I knew the voice, and I stopped on the instant minute."

"'Come back, you fool,' he shouted again; 'it's friends that's in it.'

"So back I went, of course, wondering to see the boys dressed up like the yeos, and James Cassidy in the middle of them, like a pigeon in a flock of crows. Faith, it's the quare pigeon the same James Cassidy was. Me bould Jim was the first man to lay hands on me. Troth, I thought it was friendship at first. But he stooped down and snapped a letter out of my busom that I was carrying to Father Murphy."

"Father Murphy!" said Blake under his breath.

"'Easy, James, easy,' said myself, 'that's for his reverence, no less.'

"'His reverence be d——d,' he roared out, 'saving your presence.'"

"Half a dozen of them laid hold of me at the word, and they had me down on the broad of me back while you'd say 'Knife.'

"The captain took my letter and read it, and with that he let a big curse out of him. 'Tis a warning,' he said; 'there is no time to be lost.'

"'But what about this fellow, captain?' asked me bowld Cassidy. He was holding me down with a knee on me chest and a hand on me throat. 'He's a bloody rebel spy to my certain knowledge.'

"'Oh, string him up as quick as you can,' the captain answered. 'I wish we had Hepenstall with us, it would spare time. But Tom the Devil is a nate hangman enough with the rope when there's a tree convenient. You lend a hand with the job, Cassidy.' Then—but ye know the rest of the story better nor I can tell it, and good right ye have. Tom the Devil has done his last job anyway. The obliging cratur Cassidy took my share of the hanging on himself, and I'm waiting to thank him for that same.

"Don't you hear me, James?" he added, turning the body over with his foot. But the man's head had come plump upon a stone, and he was quite unconscious, though he still breathed heavily.

"I knew the man well," Blake muttered to Christy; "I was present when he was sworn in. I met him constantly, and thought him as true as steel."

"Steel is it?" cried Thady, catching at the last

word; "troth, I'd warrant he's a good hand at that same. Didn't he stale my letter nate enough?"

"The letter was to Father Murphy, you say?" Maurice asked anxiously.

"Aye, just for Father Murphy, of Boulavogue, the best priest in all Ireland. Faith, I hope his reverence will be out when the captain calls to deliver it. For that postman's knock is like to bring the house down."

"Do you know the way to his house?" Blake interposed sharply.

"Does me hand know the way to me mouth! I'd find the place blindfold."

"There may be still time to warn him if we make haste; are you listening, Thady?"

"Wid both me ears," and his face was all alight with eagerness.

"You may get there in front of the soldiers; though no other man living could. You must tell Father Murphy that——Stop, I'll write a line; that's the best way."

He rummaged in his pockets, and found a pencil but no paper.

"Cassidy will lend us a bit, I'll go bail," Thady said; "he was always great at the letter-writin'." He coolly thrust his hand into the breast of the man's coat, and brought out a packet of letters.

"Why, some of them are my own letters to the

fellow," Blake exclaimed, as he tore off a back sheet, and began writing hastily. "There was a time I would have trusted him with my life."

"And he'd have taken it, too, very kindly," muttered Thady. "What are we to do with the boy now?" he asked, kneeling down beside Cassidy, and stroking his long, black, sleek hair almost affectionately.

"Put a bullet through his skull," answered Christy grimly, and cocked his rifle.

But Blake looked up from his writing, not a second too soon.

"No, no, Christy," he cried, "the fellow deserves death, but we must leave killing in cold blood to the devils to whom he has sold himself."

Thady laughed delightedly. "Yes! yes!" he ejaculated, "we'll lave him to his friends; but I'll titivate him a small bit, to make his friends glad to see him when they meet the next time."

He caught the man by the long black hair, and whipped out a straight, bright knife, that gleamed white in the sunlight.

The flash caught Blake's eye, and his grasp fell on Thady's arm like a vice.

"No fear, Maurice; no fear asthore," Thady said, smiling back over his shoulder; "it's a barber I'm going to be, not a butcher."

With a few dexterous cuts of the knife, that

was keen as a razor, he shore off the long black hair close to the skull.

"There now, you see, I have made him a dacent 'croppy' in spite of himself," he whispered to Christy, who grinned in sympathy as Thady's purpose dawned on him.

From somewhere under his rags Thady plucked out a green silk scarf. He kissed the silk reverently, and whispered an apology as though it were alive.

"It's a sin and a shame, me dear," he muttered, "to demane you with the likes of him, but shure our motive is good anyways," and he folded the scarf neatly and hid it in Cassidy's bosom.

Meanwhile Christy had tied the man's hands and feet tight with the cords that had bound Thady. Together they lifted the unconscious body and set it beside the upturned barrel under the dangling rope.

"It may come in handy yet," Christy said, "when his friends find him here."

Thady picked up the bundle of letters and put them back beside the green scarf in Cassidy's breast. "Hopin' they'll be your letters of introduction to the halter, me dear," he whispered into the unconscious ear in his friendliest tone.

So quickly was the whole thing done that when

Maurice had scribbled the letter for Thady, Thady was ready.

Without a word he took it, waved his cap in the air, and was off like the wind—as swift and as silent—on the track of the mounted yeomen.

Chapter XVI

THE WRONG MAN

"How have you made division of yourself?
An apple cleft in two is not more twin
Than these two creatures."

BLAKE and Culkin followed rapidly. But Thady drew away from them as a hare draws away from a lurcher. They saw his figure grow small in the distance, and rise and vanish over a smooth slope half a mile away.

When, in their turn, they reached the rising ground, they stood stock still, and a simultaneous cry of dismay broke from their lips.

With a sinking of the heart they saw Thady in the open ground below them, flying back quicker than he had gone, with nearly a score of mounted yeomen thundering at his heels.

His speed was wonderful. He seemed to be actually gaining on the horsemen. Straight on he led them to a stretch of shaking bog that lay in the cup of the valley. Leaping from hillock to hillock, Thady skimmed, light as a swallow, over

the treacherous surface. A moment after the foremost horses went in almost to the girths in the treacherous swamp.

Now, turning sharp to the right, Thady got clear of the bog, and made for the shelter of a wood that bordered the valley, only a few hundred yards away.

With an angry splutter of shouts and curses the yeomen drew their horses back clear of the clinging bog stuff. But before their hoofs found firm land again, Thady had vanished into the shelter of the woods.

The eager watchers on the hill-top drew a deep breath of relief as he vanished into cover, safe, as they fondly thought, from pursuit. The next moment, with a gasp of amazement and horror, they saw him come flying out again, the same side of the wood as he had entered, right into the teeth of the advancing horsemen.

"D——n the fool! he's done for," Christy growled, in a very agony of pity.

The horsemen spread out in open file and unslung their carbines.

"Halt!" a hoarse voice sang out, but the flying figure never paused.

"Halt! or we fire!" He was scarce forty yards away, and for the first time seemed to notice the row of pointing carbines. He checked his

headlong speed and doubled, like a doubling hare.

"Fire!" that hoarse voice rang out again, and a dozen carbines spoke at once.

The flying figure pitched forward on its face, and lay with the right arm doubled under the body, stone dead.

Without waiting even to pick up their game, the troop loaded and re-slung their carbines, and rode clattering off in the opposite direction.

"Poor Thady!" Christy murmured, as they stole cautiously from their ambuscade; "the dacentest cratur that ever stepped barefoot. If his wits were small itself, troth, his heart made up for it. I'll give him a spadeful of earth anyhow, though corpses are as thick as midges over ground. Bad luck to them that makes them. Sorra wan kick the devils have left in the poor cratur."

They were now close to the body, which lay sprawling, face downwards, stone dead. No second glance was needed to tell them that.

What was it, then, that made them both at the same moment cry out sharply and break into a run?

THE DEAD BODY WAS NOT THADY'S. Coming close up Christy turned it over on its back, and started back in sudden surprise—almost fear.

The dead man's face was the model of his own; the dead man's figure was the model of his own. The same age, the same height, the same coloured hair. Slight discrepancies a keen eye might perhaps have found. The disfiguring hand of death made many a change. Still, in general outline of face and figure, the two were like as twin brothers.

"You never had a brother, Christy?" Blake asked bewildered.

"Nor sister aither, and I'm not goin' to claim this lad any way. He's a yeoman by the regulation boots of him. See here! wasn't I right?"

His searching eyes had caught a glimpse of bright colour; he opened the dead man's coat and showed a sergeant's uniform turned inside out, lined with the homespun frieze of the peasant—a quick and handy disguise.

Christy drew a bundle of letters from the coat pocket, one and all addressed to Sergeant Saunders.

"That settles it," he said; "the yeomen's bullets saved the pike a job when they finished him. I never wished them worse luck nor better with their shootin'. But where's Thady?"

"Here's Thady," said a voice at their elbow that made both start. So silently had he stolen from the woods that even their keen ears heard no sound.

He was looking down with a kindly look in his light blue eyes on the bullet-torn corpse.

"I found me friend in the woods within fast asleep," he said; "troth, I almost stumbled over him where he lay. There was a bottle beside him with a strong smell—and nothing else in it. Faith, he left it behind in his hurry. 'Ould Ireland for ever!' cried meself when I saw him; and he was off at the word, without bidding me the time of day, like a bolting rabbit out of the wood. I didn't try to keep him either, for I knew his friends were outside waitin' with a warm welcome."

"How many miles are we from Father Murphy's, Thady?" interrupted Blake.

"Twenty-five as a horse gallops; seventeen as the crow flies."

"We may do it yet," he muttered. "They have got a couple of miles start of us, but their horses are tired."

"Not more than our legs," grumbled Christy.

"We must try to forget that. While there is a chance that we may be in time, though it is a poor one, we must take it.

"The short cut to Father Murphy's, Thady," he added with decision in his voice; "keep in sight of us, and we will follow as you lead."

"If we can," said Christy under his breath, "but I doubt it."

Blake's words put Thady instantly in motion. Turning almost at right angles to the way the yeomen had gone, he set off in a swing trot, swift, easy, effortless as a sheep-dog's. The faint trace of a narrow pathway skirted the wood on the far side and climbed the slope of the hill.

"Sure you are goin' right, Thady?" Christy asked, for they had curved clean away from the line taken by the soldiers.

"Sure as a gun," Thady answered over his shoulder with a cheerful smile. "Don't be in the laste unaisy. You'll have your fair chance to be shot along with his reverence."

Chapter XVII

THE FIRST BLOW

"Depending on the long bright pike,
And well it worked its way."

AFTER that there was no word spoken. Thady went forward in front of them, like a wide ranging Irish setter that looks back now and again waiting for the sportsmen.

Up hill and down dale, through patches of bog and rough shingle and deep brown heather, their path ran. The hot summer's sun broiled them. Blake's muscles and Christy's, though tough as whalebone with hard training, stiffened and ached with that long strain. But Thady glided on without an effort, tireless as a bird on the wing.

Where a little well bubbled up through the stones and heather to lose itself instantly, lacing the rich brown and purple of the heath with streaks of vivid green, they rested for a moment or two, half their long task done. A huge hollow peak of black rock sheltered them in a hot

shade from the hotter sunshine. They ate sparingly of bread and meat from their knapsacks, and drank greedily of the cool water. Thady meanwhile stood pale and cool, clear of the sheltering rock, in the fierce straight rays of the sun. He would not taste of the bread or meat they offered him, nor of the water, but quietly munched some dry, thirsty crumbs of an oatmeal griddle cake, which he drew from some pocket under his rags.

At the first sign from Blake he was off before them again like a dog from the leash.

There came a break in the line of hills, and they could see the horsemen in the distance.

"They'll be there to welcome us, do our best," Thady muttered, as a turn in the path again closed the view.

Nearly another hour passed, and yet they toiled on, steady though despairing. Thady, who still kept well to the front, at last stopped and waited for them.

"Do you see that big lump of a rock there forninst us, about half a mile away, the wan with the head on it like a bull? You can see Father Murphy's place down below you from there. The big chapel and the priest's house stand together, like a big white cow with her calfeen close beside."

His words quickened their pace. Where the path touched the side of the high cliff the outer angle had broken off and fallen, and the only foothold was a few inches of jagged rock with a sheer wall of stone stretching fifty feet both over and under it.

"There was a man fell down there last winter," said Thady cheerfully, turning his head to Blake, who crept after him round the dangerous curve, "and they only got the lavings of him on the stones below."

From the further side they came out on a steep but smooth slope, that looked down over a pleasant valley.

"Too late!" cried Thady piteously; "the devils have made a hell for themselves in God's own house."

True enough there was a dull red glare of fire in the valley, and a column of thick unbroken smoke in solid coils rose and curved like a huge hurrying serpent across the clear sky.

Maddened by the sight, the three men forgot all caution. They left the safe cover of the rocks and went headlong, staggering with their own speed, down the steep decline. Thady, light-footed as a goat, kept his place still in front.

Round the bottom of the hill a stream ran, a

torrent in the winter, now shallowed by the hot sun to a narrow channel in the middle of a rocky bed.

As they drew closer to the fire, they could see dimly through the drifting smoke that a group of men had gathered in the sloping graveyard near the blazing chapel, and they slackened their speed.

Suddenly Thady uttered a cry and started to run like a deer. Like a deer he leaped the channel of the brook—eighteen clear feet at least from rocky bank to bank—and raced straight for the group of men gathered on the slope of the churchyard.

Blake and Christy, gazing in open-eyed amazement, saw the men throw up their hands and shout as he came, but he never paused till he was amongst them.

The crowd closed round him wildly, and hid him for a moment. When it opened they saw Thady with a man beside him coming swiftly towards them.

"Father Murphy himself!" cried Maurice Blake joyfully, as the priest's long black soutane came in sight through the glass.

They met on the opposite banks of the brook.

"What a noble, kindly face it is," was Blake's first thought.

Father Murphy was indeed good to look upon, a man after God's own heart, gentle and kindly. But the steady light of those dark blue eyes, the firm lines of those tight-closed lips, told of the enduring courage that has so often sent men to death in a noble cause. He was quite calm now, but it was the terrible calm of gentleness enraged that bodes ill for the wrongdoers.

"This way, Mr. Blake," he cried pleasantly; "the stepping-stones are further down."

But Maurice, with a short, steady run, leaped and landed as Thady had done, safe on the further side, while Christy stolidly waded knee deep through the brown water of the trout stream.

"Father Murphy?" said Maurice, with hand cordially extended.

"So my people call me," the priest answered smiling. "By my people's rulers I am called a 'Papish rebel and traitor.'"

"I am——"

"There is no need to tell me. I have heard of you, Mr. Blake, and seen you before. The friend of Lord Edward Fitzgerald is welcome to every true lover of Ireland."

"Lord Edward is dead. He died in prison."

The priest staggered and paled as from a sudden blow, but instantly recovered himself.

"I feared it," he said softly. "God's will be done, though this is hard to bear. May God have mercy on his soul."

"It is from Lord Edward I came," Maurice began eagerly. "I come with a message from his dying lips," but even as he spoke he felt how vain was that message of peace at such a time and place.

"Lord Edward prayed the rising might be delayed," he added feebly.

"So prayed we all," the priest sadly answered as they walked together towards the burning chapel. "It has not pleased God to hear our prayers. If Lord Edward were with us now, if he had seen what you and I have seen, his voice, believe it, would be for instant war. He would not preach patience when patience means only a more shameful death. To die like men, or die like dogs, is the only choice left to us."

They had come close to the group of men gathered in the churchyard amongst the rude graves of their fathers.

There were about twenty in all, and each man gripped a trusty pike with broad head and keen point Their faces were formidable as their weapons.

"Every man amongst them has suffered," Father Murphy said softly; "their houses burned,

their wives and children slain in cold blood. Can I cry 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace? Can I tell them to sit still to be slaughtered like unresisting sheep?"

"No! by God!" cried Blake, the peacemaker, his blood on fire in his veins. "If our tyrants want rebellion they must have it—more than they bargained for. Despair has won harder battles before now. At least we shall die fighting, not whining, and the enemy shall die with us. Father Murphy, you can count on me to the death."

"And me," said Christy shortly.

Thady said nothing. He drew the long keen knife from amongst his rags and took his stand amongst the pikemen.

Those of the men who had heard Blake speak, raised a hoarse cheer, which blended strangely with the roar of the flames close at hand, as the flickering blaze rose and fell. Gaunt figures and haggard faces, and eyes red with weeping and watching, with no arms but a pike a man, yet there was something in that group of rugged peasants that the most disciplined troops in Europe might well fear.

Father Murphy glanced from them to Blake with a look of stern pride on his calm face.

"Scarcely half an hour ago," he began quietly,

"about a score of horsemen cantered up to my poor house, and halted in front and rear. They sent a volley of bullets, on chance, through doors and windows before they broke into the house. But I had seen them coming, and watched them from a safe hiding-place,—hollowed out of that green bank you see there yonder—not fifty yards away. They went through the house like a whirlwind, stabbing and smashing with bayonet and musket butt. No living thing was found but my poor little dog, which, God forgive me, I forgot to call away when I saved myself. It was lying coiled up in my easy chair, but it broke out at the noise, barking furiously. One rough fellow was for putting his bayonet through it, but another, more devilish, held his hand.

"'Let us tie it in the house,' he said, 'before we set the place on fire.' And they did. I could hear the poor creature's pitiful yelping through the noise of the flames.

"Leaving the house and chapel blazing, they rode away down the valley, swearing they would hunt the Papish fox 'to the death.'

"The blaze of the burning chapel was the signal that gathered those poor boys, God bless them, to rescue their priest, or to revenge him. Another time may be——"

"They are coming back," Maurice Blake inter-

rupted, and he passed the field-glass he held to the priest.

The moving speck far up the valley broadened out into a clump of horsemen as he gazed. Turning sharp round the priest looked keenly into the resolute faces of his parishioners. Not a man stirred, not a cheek paled, not an eyelid quivered.

"Let them come, and be d——d to them! beggin' yer reverence's pardon," a grey-haired giant muttered under his breath. "We're ready."

There was a low murmur of approval.

Father Murphy forgot to reprove the curse.

"But you have no firearms, boys," he said quietly, "and they have."

"Devil a hair we care, your reverence," said the first speaker; "if you wance give us the word we'll take our chance an' welcome."

"We have two rifles here anyway," Blake interposed, "and can use them."

"Give my men the chance they ask for, Mr. Blake," the priest said very quietly; but there was a strange look—a terrible look, stern and pitiless—on his face, and the light of battle kindled in his eyes. He turned to his men.

"Drive your pike heads into the clay through the long grass," he said, "and lower their handles out of sight. Steady, now! let no man stir."

Silent and motionless the group of men stood waiting death on the green churchyard slope under the straight rays of the hot sun.

There was no sound but the roar of the flames and the crash of falling beams.

Maurice Blake and Christy laid their rifles behind a tombstone, and took their stand in the front with pikes like the rest.

The priest's sole weapon was the crucifix.

Nearer the horsemen came down the long slope, till the men waiting in the churchyard could hear the trampling of hoofs and catch the glint of steel and the gleam of scarlet in the quivering sunlight.

A fierce shout broke out from the horsemen when at last they caught sight of their prey.

The ranks opened to cut off retreat at either side. Behind the hapless peasants the blazing chapel lay, barring flight.

About a hundred yards off the yeomen halted at last, and the captain came forward a little before the rest, straining his eyes to pierce the veil of smoke that drifted and eddied round the churchyard.

"Surrender!" he shouted. "The first man that moves hand or foot will be shot down like a dog."

Of the group of peasants on the slope not a

man stirred. "I could pick him off handy from here," Christy muttered under his breath with a longing glance at where his rifle lay.

But the warning eyes of Father Murphy enforced silence. "Will you spare our lives if we surrender?" he called back in a voice that rose clear above the crackling of the flames.

But the captain answered fiercely, "I hold no parley with surpliced ruffians and rebels. Your fate be on your own head."

His men came up behind him, impatient for the slaughter, closing round in a half circle. Slowly, cautiously, each man with finger on the trigger of his carbine, ready to pour in a volley at the slightest movement towards flight or fight. But the men in front stood well apart, motionless as statues.

"Your left hands to their bridles," the priest whispered; "use the pike with the right. Each take his man; not one must escape."

The yeomen were scarcely fifty yards off now. They halt for a moment; a terrible pause. At any moment a storm of bullets might have come crashing through the ranks of the defenceless peasantry.

Their motionless submission saved them. The circle of armed horsemen began to close in again nearer and nearer. They could see the peasants

held only staves in their hands, and came on more recklessly; the captain a little in front of his men, with his sword drawn ready.

Maurice Blake was the first man he met.

"Drop that cudgel, sirrah!" the captain cried. and struck him sharply with the flat of his sword on the cheek. In an instant Blake's left hand gripped the bridle rein. The startled horse jerked his head back, and the captain, with a cry of rage, swung up his sword to strike.

But the bright pikehead suddenly flashed from its sheath in the earth, while the sword still hung suspended in the air, and went crash through the captain's breast. The sword falling loose gashed the ear of the startled horse, which, rearing violently, flung off the lifeless body of its master.

That was the signal. For a few moments there was a wild confused stampede of trampling horses and clash of steel and shouts of men.

The tumult ceased as suddenly as it began. Two mounted yeomen went wildly back the way they came, men and horses alike mad with fright. The rest were strewn lifeless in the graveyard with broad gashes in breast side: so quick and thorough was the work of the rude pikes and the strong arms that wielded them.

Father Murphy had stood apart during the

struggle with cheeks pale and eyes alight, praying fast and hard.

Now he turned to his men with the crucifix raised high over his head.

Instantly they dropped on their knees on the grass red with the blood of their own spilling.

But before the priest could speak, the roof of the blazing church fell in with a thundering crash and wild whirlwind of sparks and spouting flames; and a low moan of wrath broke from the throng.

The voice of their pastor silenced them.

"It is God's war," he said; "we begin to-day and with God's help we will fight it out to the end."

The kneeling peasants answered a solemn "Amen."

Chapter XVIII

RIGHTLY STRUGGLING TO BE FREE

"They came into the country, our blood to waste and spill,
But let them think of Wexford, and weep for Oulart Hill;
We are the boys of Wexford, who fought with heart and hand
To burst in twain the galling chain and free our Native Land."

ALL Wexford rose. The news of the fight and victory at Boulavogue spread over the country side, stirring men's blood like strong wine. Day and night half armed peasants came flocking into the rude camp which Father Murphy had raised on the slope of Oulart Hill, with the green flag flying proudly over it.

Amongst the loyalists the talk of this "treacherous and brutal massacre" by the rebels was on every lip magnified and distorted by confusing rumour, and stirring them at first to wild rage rather than to fear.

Preparations were in rapid progress to storm Oulart Hill, and revenge "the outrages of the papish rebels." The peasants' camp was allowed but a brief respite and rallying time.

The next Sabbath morning dawned bright and cheerful on Oulart Hill, as though no strife or cruelty polluted the peaceful and beautiful world. The great crowd—men, women and little children—knelt upon the hillside, while the sacred sacrifice was being solemnized by their priest and leader, and their devotion was not slackened, but made more fervent, by the peril of the time and the wild and strange situation in which they found themselves.

About noon—a windless and cloudless noon—there came to the anxious eyes of the watchers a gleam of scarlet, shining far off on the long straight road that led out from Wexford town.

Blake's quick eye was the first that caught the gleam and divined its meaning, and soon fleet-footed Thady carried the startling news to their heroic leader, Father Murphy, that the enemy were coming out against them in force,

Slowly under the strained eyes of the watchers on the hill the red speck lengthened into a trailing ribbon of scarlet.

As the loyalist troops began to climb the swelling slopes of Bolubwee, it was seen that the attacking party largely exceeded the effective strength of the defenders, and they were supported by a strong force of cavalry as well.

On they came steadily, without haste and with-

out pause, till a halt was called on the level ground, a little distance from the base of Oulart Hill.

The anxious watchers up the heights could see the moving wave of scarlet, touched here and there with the angry sparkle of steel, as the enemy formed in line of battle. They could hear the sharply spoken words of command.

Presently the cavalry deployed round the base of the hill to "cut off the flying rebels," while the infantry, in close order, pushed steadily and silently up the slope.

Meanwhile Father Murphy had not been idle. The old men and women and children, who in numbers made the chief part of the camp, were gathered to the rear. In front the fighting men's rude arms and resolute hearts stood a strong barrier between them and sharp torture and pitiless death.

Midway up, a high ditch ran athwart the face of the hill.

Behind the ditch, invisible to the ascending foe, the pikemen lurked, gripping their weapons hard. In front, the muzzles of half-score of rebel guns peeped over the ditch's edge, with steady fingers on the triggers and keen eyes on the sights. Not a sound told that death was waiting there.

Still the loyalist forces advanced quickly, confi-

dently, thoughtless of danger, eager for vengeance. At their head came Major Lombard cheering his men to the slaughter.

As he rose over a ridge of the hill into clear sight, a broad, vacant space stretched between the ditch that held the watchful rebels. He raised his helmet and waved it, like a huntsman that lays his dogs on the track of the hunted fox. "Gone away! gone away!" he shouted.

At that moment a point of flame and a puff of smoke showed at the ditch's edge, then a single sharp crack of a rifle rang out on the still air, and a bullet crashed through the naked head of Major Lombard, and he dropped like a sack of corn, heavy, limp, lifeless, right in front of his advancing soldiers.

Still they had no fear. With a cry of rage, and muskets ready at their shoulders, they broke into a quicker march straight for the ditch where the lurking danger lay.

"Faith, I'm thinkin' me hat would mind a bullet less nor me head," said Thady, in the front row, to Christy Culkin, who had thrown down his smoking rifle and grasped a broad-headed pike.

As he spoke, Thady set his own ragged caubeen on his weapon's point and raised it cautiously.

The keen-witted peasants were quick to take

the hint. A score or so of hats perched on pike-heads peered over the edge of the ditch, and drew an instant volley from the advancing troops.

"Now!" Blake's voice shouted.

Like a rising torrent that overleaps its banks, as sudden, as strong, the rushing stream of pike-men were upon them.

For one brief moment there was a pause, a wild seething struggle as the front ranks met pike-heads flashed through the melee bright or bloody. Then, as a dam before the torrent, the soldiers' line broke to pieces in that furious onset, and the pursuers and the pursued, grappling in a death-struggle, went down the hill together. Sword and bayonet were vain before the quick thrust of the death-dealing pike, which, now shortened to a dagger length, now stretched to a spear. The hill-side was strewn thick with slaughtered soldiers, and half way down the fierce pursuers paused for lack of prey.

Slowly, almost reluctantly, they came back to their camping place, hands and weapons died scarlet with new-spilled blood.

Meanwhile, the cavalry, paralysed by the suddenness of the onset, the defeat, the annihilation of their comrades, sat stock still where they had been posted.

"Couldn't you send them a messenger that it's

time to be goin' home, agra," Thady whispered to Christy, who had again picked up his discarded rifle and laid his blood-covered pike aside.

"It's a long way off, Thady," Christy answered, "and, faith! that same pike is a tiresome tool to do a day's work with. My hand is not too steady after dealing with it. But sure, there is no harm in having a try anyway. Here goes."

He crept down the hill a little closer to where the cavalry were gathering into a cluster like frightened wild fowl.

Christy dropped on his knees behind a rock, which gave rest for his rifle, and took long and steady aim.

One man amongst the troopers with arm upraised seemed haranguing the rest.

His voice suddenly ended in a cry of pain, and his hands jerked the reins hard. The frightened horse reared and flung him headlong.

The troops saw the puff and flash on the hillside, and heard the slow report that followed. At once they broke into tumultuous flight, recklessly trampling the dead body of their comrade that lay in their track.

Woe betide the unarmed peasants the cowards met in that headlong ride to Wexford.

At early dawn the Irish camp on Oulart was all astir. In the level rays of the morning sun, the

peasants, with their pikes on their shoulders, came streaming down the hillside, Father Murphy at their head. Their first vantage point was the village of Camolin, where they learned that the loyalist troops had fled to Enniscorthy. From Camolin they marched to Ferns, and thence to the bridge of Scarawalsh, gathering recruits as they went; for the good tidings of their victory had gone abroad over the whole country side.

The recruits for the most part carried flint guns with long, heavy barrels, which they managed most dexterously; for all the lake side and the coast abounded in waterfowl, for which these gunmen lay in wait, dropping them by night or day from the air into the water at a hundred yards away. Their rude but serviceable weapons and deadly aim were invaluable now.

To them was given the place of honour in the projected attack on Enniscorthy, with the flower of the pikemen ranged behind.

Nearing the town by a broad, straight road, flanked by high ditches on either hand, they saw the enemy massed in front of the Duffly Gate ready to receive them. The loyalist forces occupied an impregnable position. Their left flank was covered by the river Slaney; their right and rear by the high ramparts of the town, where sharpshooters were perched at every vantage point. In front

two small field pieces commanded the road by which the Irish must advance.

As the van of the rebel forces came in sight, a cheer went up from the garrison, and a troop of cavalry rode out at a hard gallop to engage them.

The charge was expected and provided for by Father Murphy. The men with guns, the small body of rifle-men, who led the attack, parted in the middle. Nimble as cats, they climbed the high ditch that lined the road on either hand, and lay secure with deadly weapons pointed, and fingers to the triggers, waiting for the cavalry.

The pikemen behind stood their ground like a rock, but their courage was not tested then.

The cavalry came gallantly on with loosened reins and swords glancing in the sunshine. Nearer and nearer, they are not fifty yards off now. "Charge!" their officer shouted. They plunged their spurs in their horses, and thundered down on the steady ranks of opposing pikemen.

Like an echo, the answering cry, "Fire!" rang out from Father Murphy. As if that cry loosed a hundred triggers, a withering cross fire swept the foremost troopers from their saddles. The next instant, in a wild, panic-stricken stampede, the mob of horses, ridden or riderless, are galloping back to Enniscorthy.

The broad road lay open to the town, but there death waited sullen, inevitable. In close array, with muskets ready, the defending troops are marshalled in front. Behind them, on a height, two field pieces, primed and loaded, command the pass.

The insurgents held back in blank dismay. It was not danger or death they dreaded, but defeat.

Again Father Murphy's cheery voice was heard.

"Drive the cattle to the front," he cried, "the youngest and the wildest first."

No more was said, no more was needed.

A great drove of wild cattle, strong limbed and active, with horns like spears, went forward with a rush, the fierce pikemen goading and yelling in the rear.

The garrison saw them coming. High over the wild lowing of the frightened cattle, and the sound of their thundering hoofs, they heard the fierce shouts of their foes. Volley after volley, from field piece and musket, the enemy poured into them as they came. But as well might they expect with bullet and round shot to check the rush of the mountain torrent, or the sweep of the whirlwind. With an awful crash that great wave of mad life struck and burst. Behind the trampling

hoofs and goring horns of the cattle flashed the deadlier weapons of the pikemen. In one wild rush, garrison and cattle were driven pell-mell together over the bridge, with the triumphant Irish at their heels, and Enniscorthy was taken.

Meanwhile, in Wexford, elaborate preparations had been made for defence. Loyalist troops mustered from all quarters, and loud was the boasting of the warm welcome the croppies would receive.

But when the news came to Wexford that the "rebels" had taken Enniscorthy, and were marching on the town, this volatile courage speedily evaporated. Panic captured the place before their coming The loyalist officers tore off their epaulets, and turned their coats, and flung away the rams that might impede their flight. The garrison fled by land and water. A few hours later, when the insurgents, without shot fired or blow struck, marched triumphantly into Wexford, green flags and streamers fluttered from the roofs and windows of the Orangemen, who had heretofore been most prominent in the loyal work of torturing and butchering the rebel croppies for the "wearing of the Green."

But on the morning of the 4th June, to the main body of the insurgents then encamped on Carrigew Hill, the startling news came that two large de-

tachments of regular troops, horse, foot and artillery, under the command of General Loftus and Colonel Walpole, were marching to the attack.

After very brief consultation it was resolved to meet the enemy half way, and drive them back to Gorey, where a great number of United Irishmen lay in prison awaiting immediate execution.

A detachment of nimble-footed peasants, with their long-barrelled, deadly fowling-pieces on their shoulders, were despatched in advance, to keep the enemy in check till the main body, armed with pikes and scythes, could come up.

They started at a run, light-hearted, light-footed, as if it were a sporting expedition by river or lake, not the deadly business of war, they were engaged on.

While they were yet far off, the mounted scouts of Colonel Walpole came in with news of their approach, and he made ready for their reception.

Passing through the little village of Tubberneery, he halted his forces just outside it on the broad high road, which, fifty yards off, turned sharply off in the direction of Carrignew.

There, with his artillery posted in front, the guns ready loaded with ball and canister, he waited silent, motionless, till the rebels should come rushing round the corner of the road into the trap.

Nor had he long to wait. The rebels coming at a quick trot, showed suddenly round the bend of the road.

Crash! crash! the artillery broke out, tearing a lane through them. The pattering fire of muskets followed, ill-directed, through the smoke.

For one moment the rebels stood dismayed and wavering at the sudden and terrible assault—only for a moment. The next, the stratagem of Enniscorthy was repeated. Like wild cats they were over the fences on either side.

When the smoke cleared, the loyalists saw nothing but the scattered corpses strewn on the road. But soon a sharp crossfire from the ditches on either side told them where the enemy had disappeared. The fire was close, the aim deadly. Man after man threw up his arms, and dropped, writhing.

"This must be stopped at any cost," cried Walpole. "We must drive out those wasps. There are gates lower down; take two detachments, and——"

A low, thunderous sound was heard as he spoke, afar off, like the trampling surf on a rocky shore.

"It is the main body of the rebels," Walpole cried, pushing to the front, where the artillery were stationed. "Steady, boys," he said, "steady now, look to your guns, the croppies are coming."

Clearer the sound grew and louder. The rebels

heard it too. A shout of triumph broke out and ceased abruptly. The sharp fusillade grew sharper and more incessant.

Maurice Blake turned to Christy, who knelt beside him, loading and firing steadily. "Aim for the gunners only," he said, "and pass the word along. We must silence the artillery."

A man stood ready by the foremost cannon, waiting the coming rebels, with the linstock sparkling in his hand. Before Blake had done speaking, as it seemed, his rifle cracked, and the man rolled over dead.

Nearer and nearer the wild sound came: the tramp of many feet, the sound of many voices. The glint of pikes showed round the bend of the road, the pikemen poured into the straight. The fusillade quickened from the ambuscade. The rain of leaden pellets pattered on the breaches of the big guns, and dropped in little shining discs of white metal. The gunners rolled over, man after man, before the linstock could touch the priming. The artillery never spoke at all. With one mad rush the pikemen were upon the enemy, and even as they came, Colonel Walpole fell with a bullet through his brain.

A moment's struggle, and it was over. There was no standing against that furious onset.

In a wild, struggling stream the victors and the routed swept on towards Gorey.

Gradually the cavalry in front of the flight drew clear of the stampede. The insurgents followed at a run, for they thought of their friends imprisoned in Gorey, and they knew the savagery of the men they held in chase.

They had good reason for their fears. The prisoners, cooped together in one great room in Gorey jail, heard the thunder of hoofs, and the cry of voices as the cavalry came thundering along, well clear of their pursuers.

With faces pressed close to the windows between the bars, they could see the tumult in the street. Then came a furious knocking, and a storm of angry shouting at the prison door. But the jailer had fled, carrying the keys with him. There was a brief, ominous pause.

"Down! down!" cried Esmond Ryan from the window to his fellow prisoners, "lie flat for your lives."

He spoke not a second too soon. A volley crashed through the windows, shivering the glass to pieces. But the flattened bullets spent themselves harmlessly from the further wall.

The angry shout of the pursuing pikemen followed close upon the sound. The baffled loyalist heroes mounted in hot haste, and galloped through the town without a pause. The insurgents, marching into Gorey, found none but friends to welcome them.

Chapter XIX

THE TURNING-POINT

"Though Victory her wreath deny,
Yet fame is theirs who bravely strive,
And her sons' death, who nobly die,
Still keep the Nation's heart alive."

"TO-MORROW makes or mars us, Christy," Blake said as they sat together under the quiet starlight on Corbet Hill, looking down on the lights of the walled town of New Ross, which the insurgents were to assault in the morning. Thady lay in a hollow a little way down the hill, curled up like a hare, and fast asleep.

"We'll take the place, of course," Christy answered shortly.

"I hope so. New Ross once won, all Wexford is ours. Nothing can then stop our march upon Dublin."

"You HOPE! so," said Christy, a little crossly? "ain't you sure of it? The soldiers cannot stand before the pikes. Our boys are just mad to get at them."

"Aye! to get at them. If they once get at them I've no fear, but the six pounders are in the way, and pikes are little use against cannon balls, Christy."

"The boys mind them no more than footballs when their blood is up."

"But courage won't keep death off, and dead men cannot win battles. The whole of this business has been a miserable blunder. Harvey, — our general, in spite of himself,— has neither the brains nor the pluck for the post. It was a blunder to send poor young Furlong down yesterday with a flag of truce to get shot for his pains. We should have rushed the place without warning. Now they are on their guard. Two six-pounders are planted at Threebullet Gate. The ditches for half a mile out are lined with sharpshooters. Our men are to march down the straight, broad road to death to-morrow morning."

"Do you want to frighten me?" said Christy with a chuckle. "There is time enough for us yet to run away in the dark. Don't I know you, and don't I know that your foot will be first on that same road, though the devil himself tried to stop you? You are as wild for the fighting as that young lad, Master Lett, that ran away from his mother to join us last night. But it is time for us to get a wink of sleep, like sensible Thady over

there; for, troth, we have our work cut out for us, and no mistake, in the morning."

At dawn the rebel camp was astir.

Colonel Kelly, with a picked party, was despatched through the fields to the right of the road to dislodge the sharpshooters that lined the ditches. With him Blake and Christy went. Thady O'Flynn had struck up a sudden friendship for the lad, Lett —a truant hero of thirteen years of age who had stolen away to join the rebel camp the night before, and loitered behind in his company.

In a series of short, sharp rushes from cover to cover, Colonel Kelly drove the out-lying enemy before him up to the very walls of the town. A strong detachment of cavalry advanced to their support. The pikemen, though attacked by superior numbers, held their own gallantly, cutting the horses' reins with the sharp hook of their formidable weapon, and striking the riders headlong from the saddle with the broad blade. Loyalist reinforcements continued to pour in, and now Colonel Clooney rushed to Kelly's assistance with rebel reinforcement. It was a hot, close fight, man to man; for the artillery dare not fire on the mingled mass of friend and foe.

Still the pikemen held their own in the fierce, unequal fight. But the shouts of the combatants, and the clang and the gleam of their weapons,

stirred to madness the hot blood of the main body of the rebels—still stationed inactive on the hillside. Their general was posted far up the slope—clean out of sight and hearing—a passive spectator of the battle. But those maddened men waited for no leading; they wanted none. Forming in close rank they swept down the broad road of death towards the Three-bullet Gate, where the enemy's artillery was posted, silent, ominous.

Forward the great mass of men went swiftly, jubilantly, the green banners waving over them, the pike blades glancing in the sunshine.

Then the two big guns at the gate crashed out together, belching smoke and flame. Through the close ranks of the rebels the grape and round shot ploughed long furrows.

The dead and dying cumbered the road in ghastly heaps; the air was full of groaning.

Behind the cloud of smoke they knew the gunners were busily re-loading.

There was a moment's faltering in the rebels, charge, but ere the pause could grow into a panic, a slight boyish figure sprang before the wavering pikemen,—a youth scarce thirteen years of age with frank blue eyes and long yellow curls like a girl. Lightly the boy sprang through the tangled mounds of dead and wounded that lay thickest to the front, and caught a flag from a dead man's hand. The

small square of green waved to the front high over his boyish head.

"Follow me who dare!" the boy cried in a shrill, childish treble, and sped forward without a glance behind. Like a living avalanche, their close ranks tipped with steel, the pikemen came rushing after him.

But fast as the boy ran a wild figure went by him like an arrow. The musket bullets pelted round him as he flew, but swift as the wind, and seemingly as invulnerable, Thady swept on for the guns. In ten seconds more he is upon them.

His left hand tore his tattered hat from his head and rammed it home to the elbow in the yawning muzzle of the loaded cannon.

"Come on, boys!" he yelled, "her mouth is stopped!"

The lighted match in the gunner's hand is scarce a foot from the priming at the touch-hole. But Thady's levelled pike is quicker than the linstock. The broad blade plunges deep into the gunner's chest, and the impetus of the stroke, checked by the curved hook at the shoulder of the blade, flung him back amongst his comrades—dead.

Instantly the rushing tide of pikemen surged around the gun, and as the wild waves drive the wreck, drove the enemy back with them through the city gate.

But in the narrowing street there was a rally, and each inch of ground was stubbornly contested.

Hand to hand they fought, and weapon to weapon, as men fought round the walls of Troy in the old days, with no thought but to slay.

Side by side, Blake and Christy pressed in the front of the throng, incessantly striking and parrying as they went, with a sustained excitement that forgot fatigue.

A cart blocking the road, with a dead horse between the shafts, forced those two apart. Christy was carried on with the main rush to the left. Blake found himself driven to the right through a narrow gateway into a broad paved courtyard beyond. But not alone. Two of the enemy had found the same passage, and with edge and point of their long swords pressed him hard.

The elder of the two—a tall, gaunt man, with a sergeant's stripes upon his sleeve—fought steadily and warily with keen eyes and muscles like whalebone. Man to man he would not have had a minute's chance with Blake. But the younger and more active foe had to be reckoned with as well. Hither and thither, with the short, sharp cries and quick springs of a cur dog half-excited, half-enraged, he darted round Blake, keeping just clear

of his sword. Twice he made a desperate attempt to pass behind him. The third time Blake's dexterous sword, with a quick, long lunge, just stung him in the side. He leaped back out of reach, and Blake gained the side wall of the courtyard, and edged slowly down the yard till he got his back at last to the angle at the rear, so forcing both his foes to a front attack. Still the odds told. The elder soldier kept his sword and eyes steadily engaged, while the younger waited just out of reach to spring in with a sudden thrust. No skill could stand long against such attack. Blake felt the sword point pierce his tunic and rip the skin on his left side as he swerved to let a straight lunge pass, and resolved by a sudden bold attack to end the fight.

While he held the sergeant's sword with his own, feeling his purpose along the blade, from the corner of his eye he watched his more active assailant. That quick glance showed him in the act of springing.

With a strong parade Blake beat down the sergeant's blade even while he bent to let the other's sword point round by. The steel grated against the wall behind, and the youth went back like a rebounding ball. But the flash of a swift, straight thrust followed, and caught him as shot catches a bird in mid-air. With a shrill cry he

threw up his hands and fell headlong on the pavement. When Blake's sword clashed with the sergeant's again, parrying a straight thrust, it was dripping red, and the clash sent the red drops flying into his opponent's face.

He, too, had heard the cry and knew its meaning. That dash of blood in his face shook his nerve.

He broke ground at once, still moving steadily back towards the opening to the street. But Blake pushed between and turned him from the opening, and drove him back towards the wall. So it chanced he could not see, but the sergeant saw, a soldier come down the laneway from the street, stealing upon him with clubbed musket poised in act to strike.

The sergeant felt the wall at his back while the skulking figure was still ten yards away, and made desperate by fear and hope, he flung himself upon Blake with a wild thrust and cry. The thrust was parried sharply; the answering lunge went through him. Blake thrilled with savage joy as he felt the keen steel glide through the yielding flesh, and the sword-hilt, striking hard upon the broad chest, send the foe reeling to the ground.

The next instant the crash fell. A fierce throb scorched his brain. A flash of jagged lightning danced before his eyes; then the darkness and silence of death.

Chapter XX

A FRIEND IN NEED

"On Fortune's dizzy heights beware,
Success disaster waits upon;
In direst need forbid despair,
For succour comes when hope is gone."

A DULL ache that seemed to fill his whole head with pain was Maurice Blake's sole sensation as he opened his weary eyes at last to light and life. He was lying on a truss of straw in a narrow room whose bare walls contained nothing but himself and the straw. The light and heat came in together through the broken window, and the room was stifling. Gradually there grew upon Blake a feeling of torturing thirst. But the first eager questioning glance round the room showed him, unnoticed at first, a brown pitcher of water set close beside him.

Slowly, cautiously, that no drop might be lost, he raised it with trembling hands. His parched lips met the brim half-way, and a deep draught sent a shudder of delicious coolness through his blood.

Then consciousness and memory came slowly back to him, recalling each incident, to the moment his sword struck the sergeant down. Beyond that was darkness—blank as death.

Though his hands and feet were unbound, he knew himself a prisoner. In the passage outside he heard a sentry pace steadily up and down with heavy feet and jingle of steel.

A sudden gust of mad impatience came on him to know the worst for certain, and he clattered noisily with his water jug upon the floor.

Instantly the door opened sharply, and a soldier fully-armed stalked into the room.

The man came close to where Blake lay and scowled down on him.

"So you have come to life?" he growled, "and I'm d——d sorry for it."

"Where am I?" Maurice asked feebly.

"Where are you?" the other answered with an oath; "where are you? Lying at your ease on a truss of clean straw, instead of dangling from a rope as you ought to be. If I had my way I'd have given the devil his due and sent you packing to hell a week ago. But the sergeant——"

"Well, Johnson, what about the sergeant?" a sharp voice asked with a Northern twang in it, and a grim face showed over the sentry's shoulder. "What about the sergeant?" the voice repeated

more sharply as the other, quite crestfallen, was shrinking away without reply. "Be careful, Johnson," the sergeant went on warningly; "it's dangerous to be caught colloguing with croppy prisoners and abusing your own officers."

"I was only saying——"

"Best say nothing. A safe head holds a still tongue these times. Now get out as fast as you can, and remember for the future the croppy is in my charge."

The man shrunk away abashed; for the loyalist forces were honeycombed with treachery, and punishment followed sharp and sudden on suspicion.

The sergeant closed the door carefully, and stood with his back to the window looking down in silence on the prisoner.

"Well?" said Blake abruptly, "what do they intend to do with me?"

"Hang you," said the other shortly; "hang you within a week."

"Why not before? Why didn't they hang me when I was caught?"

"There are hopes of getting information from you."

"From me!" Blake echoed scornfully; "who put that notion in their heads?"

"I did," stolidly.

"You lost your labour then."

"I'm not so sure as that."

There was a curious change in the voice; there was something familiar in it that jarred on Blake's memory, vague, perplexing.

"Come out of that," he cried irritably, hardly knowing what he said; "come round to the other side into the light, where I can see your face."

The sergeant meekly obeyed and stood where the light came full on his gaunt figure and rugged features.

"Christy!" Blake whispered in a voice weak with amazement, and their hands met in hearty greeting.

"What has happened? what has come to you? I'd hardly know you," Blake faltered excitedly.

"I'm glad of that," Christy answered; "troth, I hardly know myself when I look in the glass every second day to shave."

"But what has happened?" Blake persisted, "tell me quickly."

"Not now, I'm on duty in five minutes, and you're too wake."

"Only a word or two before you go."

"Well, you remember how we parted—how the cursed cart on the road parted us. I managed, after a while, to get back to the spot and found the archway."

"I might have guessed" Maurice murmured, pressing his friend's hands.

"Oh, any dog will find its master," Christy answered hastily, "no great credit in that. The cart was now jammed in the archway itself. I had to crawl under it to get through. I was just in time. A fellow struck you down from behind with a clubbed musket. I saw him strike. He had the gun raised to finish his work as you lay. The blow fell on the handle of my pike, but the blade of it was in his belly at the time. There was no more trouble with him. But as I knelt to raise you I heard the shouts and shots of the soldiers in the street outside, and I knew our boys were being driven back. We two were caught in a death-trap. Then a bright thought came to me. I had the uniform off that dead sergeant of yours in a jiffy. His clothes fitted as if they were made for me. I dragged me own things on the corpse anyway. Then I arrested you and carried you boldly up to the archway and began shouting for help. It was a risky thing to do, but it was the only thing, and it went through all right. The yeos hauled the cart out of the way and let us through. One of them was for putting a bayonet through the wounded "croppy" then and there. But another looked close and seemed frightened of me. He whispered a word

in his comrade's ear, and they moved aside and let me pass.

"I managed to prop you up in a doorway—for you were quite senseless and limp as a half-filled sack of corn—and I watched you while the tide of fighters went roaring by me through the street. Once, when I saw a poor wounded boy not twenty years of age who had hidden in the next doorway dragged out and stabbed to death with half a dozen weapons at once, I was hardset to keep my stolen sword quiet. But it was plain the game was up, and taking it quietly was our last chance.

"I had me reward a moment or two afterwards. An officer came galloping down the street, the blood dripping from his naked sword, and I knew him at a glance for Lord Carhampton.

"He pulled up sharp at sight of me. 'Halloa! Saunders,' he cried; 'so you have come back in time for the row? Who have you got there?'

"I saluted stiff as a poker, wondering who the devil Saunders might be.

"'It's a prisoner, my lord,' I answered with a touch of North of Ireland accent, for Saunders was a North of Ireland name. 'I have knocked all the sense out of him, worse luck. I think he looks like an officer, and might tell us something worth knowing if he found his tongue again.'

"'Quite right, quite right,' he answered, laughing; 'it will be always time enough to hang him.'

"'No more work to be done here,' he went on after a pause and a glance down the emptying street. He struck his bloody sword unwiped back into the scabbard. 'Lug him along, sergeant,' he said graciously, 'and I'll show you a place to stick him in till he gets his senses back or loses them for good.'

"He was in a fine free-spoken, free-cursing humour, and by dint of holding my tongue I managed to make out who I was as we went along. I was the sergeant, you remember, that was shot instead of Thady, brought to life again. I was one of the bloodiest Orangemen of the place, and I had a fine, ready-made reputation for flogging and pitch-capping and half-hanging which has proved very useful to both of us afterwards.

"At the barrack I learned that reinforcements had come into New Ross in the middle of the fight, and the lavins of our poor boys, after the round shot and muskets, though they took the place twice no less, couldn't stand it for ever, and were beaten clean out of it in the long run.

"For a week you lay like a log. We thought there was no hope of you, and I didn't know whether to be glad or sorry at the time, for

every day worse and worse news came in from the country. All the same, it made my heart wake with joy to hear your voice colloguing with Johnson a minute ago. But you must let on to him it's still dying you are, and I'm to be your blackest enemy."

Blake's strength came back rapidly; in less than a week he was himself again. Christy, however, still kept him lying down, under pretence that he was very weak and could eat nothing, while he secretly supplied him with abundant food.

"The triangle and the halter are waiting for you when you get up," he curtly replied to Blake's remonstrances. "You're known for a friend of Lord Edward, and they hope to scourge some information out of you with the cat-of-nine-tails. Only yesterday I begged the flogging of you from Lord Carhampton. But he told me to be in no hurry. 'By all accounts, Saunders,' he said, 'the fellow is too weak yet awhile. Don't kill the goose till the golden eggs are laid. Don't throw away the orange with the juice in it. Your time will come soon enough, never fear.'

"'He's my prisoner, my lord' I grumbled, 'and I know what to do with him as well as another,' and I went off growling and sulky that I was not to flog you at once. Lord Carhampton only

laughed. They like to see zeal in dealing with the 'croppies.'"

Still, as the days went by the prospect for the country grew daily blacker and more helpless. The loud braggart talk of the barrack trickled like poison into Blake's ear as he lay there helpless. Defeat and massacre, defeat and massacre here, there, and everywhere. The tide of fortune had turned, and the unarmed peasants were butchered remorselessly.

One bright morning towards the end of the third week, Christy came to his cell with a grim smile on his face. "You are to be hanged to-morrow," he said shortly.

"To-morrow!"

"Aye, to-morrow. I'm to be let give you three dozen first as a reward for my zeal. You have brought your fate on yourself by giving false information to His Majesty's Government."

"I! Information!"

"Yes; maybe I forgot to tell you. I brought it myself every day to his lordship, so I ought to know. But sorra word of truth they got from you or me. A dozen parties went out and came back on fools' errands. One poor devil whom you informed on as a United Irishman—(maybe you'll say you don't remember it)—was arrested and flogged in consequence. Now he's found out to

be as good an Orangeman as ever trampled on a papist. His friends are clamouring for revenge, and the upshot of it is you are to be hanged to-morrow morning."

"Well!" said Blake, for he saw from Christy's face there was something more behind.

"Well, you must escape of course."

"I hardly wish to escape, even if it were possible. I have staked my life and lost it. I'll take my lot with the rest. I cannot run away from the fight."

"There are others than yourself to be considered."

Blake winced. The thoughts of Norah and his boy struck to his heart with a sudden pang.

"Besides," Christy went on slowly.

"Yes! yes! I knew you were keeping back something."

"We are not exactly running away from the fight. There is no fighting here, and there is where we are running to. THE FRENCH HAVE LANDED AT LAST!"

A new light blazed in Blake's eyes.

"Landed! The French! Where? where?"

"In our own country—in Killala. There is only a small lot of them in it by all accounts, but the people are gathering fast."

"It is our last chance," Blake said, "and in my soul I believe it is a good one. But can we get away?"

"I thought it would come to that with you when my news was all out, and you had heard tell of the fighting. We must start before the hanging to-morrow anyway. Here's my plan for want of a better. Private Johnson will be in charge of you to-night; I've managed that. I'll visit the cell with him; you be a bit restive and I'll tell him to clap the handcuffs on. He'll be glad of the job. As he stoops you must grip him by the throat, and I'll grab his arms from behind, then——"

"No, no, Christy," Blake interrupted; "it would be a cowardly, cold-blooded murder. I could not do it."

Christy's thin lips twitched with a smile. "Who spoke of killing?" he said; "it's only the divil's clothes we want, not his life. He's got to take your place for a few hours; that's all. You ram a wad of straw in his mouth and I'll tie him up neatly and put him to bed."

When the soldiers came to call the prisoner for his flogging and hanging next morning, they found Private Johnston in his bed, stripped, gagged, bound, blindfolded, with handcuffs on his wrists, and his head smothered up in a blanket. He gave so confused an account of his capture that he was suspected of conniving at Blake's escape, and got the benefit of the doubt in the

shape of the flogging that was meant for the prisoner. But the hanging never came off at all.

It was quickly discovered that Sergeant Saunders had also disappeared. It was first thought that he had been murdered by the "blood-thirsty croppy," whom he meant to hang. But his body was nowhere to be found, and after a little while the belief gained ground that the hangman and his intended victim had gone off together, and for a full week Lord Carhampton cursed his favourite sergeant with unavailing vigour.

Chapter XXI

MEETING

"She looked at him with woman's pride,
With pride, and woman's fears;
She flew to him, she clung to him,
And dried away her tears.
He feels her pulses truly beat,
While her arms around him twine,
Now God be praised for your stout heart,
Brave little wife of mine."

"HARK!" cried Norah Blake suddenly. She let the book she was reading fall and lie openleaved on the table.

The child on her knee, frightened at the sudden break off of the fairy tale, and at the change on his mother's face, grown white and strained of a sudden, cried out and clambered to kiss her.

But she put even those little clinging arms aside, and bent her whole soul to listen.

"What is it?" Peggy asked, hardly less frightened than the child at her excitement.

"Didn't you hear it? a footstep; his footstep in the street outside. Hark! there again!"

Through the soft swish and splash of the summer

rain that was falling steadily, they heard a faint tip tap like the pecking of a bird's beak on the window-pane.

Without a word the two women ran to the door.

Norah was first. With quick, deft fingers that never faltered, she slipped the smooth bolts back and dropped the heavy chain without a sound. The next moment she was clasped tight in her husband's arms, while Christy caught Peggy to himself with a hug like a grizzly bear.

Blake passed with his wife into the back room, where his little boy rushed to greet him, whooping with delight.

When Peggy's nimble fingers had put bolt and chain back in their places, Christy would have clasped her in his eager arms again, but she caught sight of his uniform, and broke from him with a little cry of surprise.

"So my dream has come true; and I have got one of the yeos for a sweetheart after all."

Norah looked up from her husband's arms and saw he too was dressed in yoeman's uniform.

"Our clothes saved our lives, darling," he said, answering her glance.

"They will cost you your lives if you don't change them at once," said Peggy the practical.

"She's right," Norah added quickly, feeling with dainty, shrinking fingers the soaked cloth of his

tunic, while the love-light shone warm in her sweet blue eyes, and her bosom beat swiftly under the muffled folds of her soft grey dress. "Come away at once. There is a fire in our room, and dry clothes ready for you."

Then those two strong, brave men, who for weeks past had kept close comradeship with danger and death, and to whom hunger and hardship had grown as a second nature, were ordered about and fed and cuddled and petted and made much of, like a couple of spoiled children. For Norah and Peggy, women like, were repaid for the killing suspense of that long anxious wait in the lonely house in Jervis Street, by the delight of ministering to the wanderers' comfort on their return. Warm baths were found, and dry clothes, for it had rained almost incessantly during their forced march from Ross to Dublin, and they were drenched as if they had been rolled in the river. A cheery fire greeted them, with two deep armchairs drawn close to the fire, on the return to their cosy parlour, and, pleasantest of all, the white cloth was laid ready for a meal.

Presently Peggy came in, flushed from the kitchen, with a huge dish of broiled beefsteak and new potatoes in her hands, and a big black bottle under her arm. Then the two men tasted food for the first time for twenty-four hours, and the two

women watched them eat with an enjoyment more intense than their own, for to feed where she loves is one of woman's most precious prerogatives.

When the meal was over, their pipes were ready waiting for them. Christy grew shy and awkward at being so petted, and when Norah would have settled him in one of the chairs before the fire he rebelled at last. But Blake's strong hand forced him into the chair, and Norah's light, grateful touch kept him there, for already she had heard from her husband of his devotion. Even in the touch of her fingers her gratitude made itself felt, while Peggy looked on shyly with eyes that sparkled with pride and pleasure.

So the pipes were lit, and the men stretched their tired limbs before the fire, with that delicious languor that comes of hunger appeased and rest after long toil.

The women crouched on the hearth-rug beside the chairs, and little Val pushed his curly head up between his father's knees, and listened with the rest, his big blue eyes wide open, and the warm flush of excitement on the soft dimpled cheeks.

Very briefly Maurice touched on their adventures since they parted, making light of the hardships and the dangers.

But the women, tingling with sympathy, heard

enough, or guessed enough, to whiten their cheeks, and fill their eyes with tears.

"I'll fight too," suddenly broke out the baby in a clear, startling treble. "I've a big drum and a sword that's beautiful sharp in one place, and I'll stick it in wicked man's eyes and kill them down dead."

"Your time will come, Val," his father said soothingly, "but it has not come yet."

All the same, the boy insisted in starting off on a voyage of discovery to the nursery in quest of the beautiful sword, to prove that he was ready for all emergencies. "And I'm not one bit afraid of the dark either," he cried, turning at the door and shaking his curls defiantly.

"It was in fear and trembling," Maurice Blake went on, concluding his brief tale of their perilous escape, "that I dared tap the familiar little tap ever so faintly on the window-pane, not knowing what changes might have come in my absence. You can imagine my joy, darling, when I found you once more in my arms."

"Thank God, it is all over, Maurice," Norah whispered softly, stealing a warm little hand into his, "and we have at last a chance of being happy together again."

He was silent for a moment, hating to have to quench the joy that shone in those loving eyes.

"Not yet, Norah," he said softly at last, "it's not all over yet. The French have landed at Killala, the people are gathering to them. The British wait them at Castlebar. There the last stand for Ireland must be made."

The soft hand in his tightened its clasp in sudden fear, and the lips quivered, but the clear blue eyes met his own without flinching.

"Your place is there, Maurice," she said slowly. "I wouldn't hold you back if I could. But we must not part again. I will go West with you to-morrow if you will."

"Impossible, my sweetest heart, and then the child?"

"You must not refuse me, Maurice; the boy can come too. It is safer there than here. We will not hinder you or hold you back, believe me. But I could not bear another fortnight of horrible suspense."

Then, when her tears pleaded for her, Maurice felt his resolution melting away, and turned to gruff Christy for support.

But Peggy had already tampered with his ally.

"Let them come," Christy said shortly, "she speaks the truth. They will be safer with us than here alone, and if the worst comes to the worst there will be a better chance of escape to America.

How to get safely out of Dublin was next to be

planned. They found the city in a state of mad confusion, swept alternately by gusts of wild panic or savage triumph, as rumours shifted from day to day. Amongst the loyal soldiers all discipline was relaxed in the universal license, and stragglers joined this company or that as their humour prompted.

Again their uniforms stood Blake and Christy in good stead.

Reinforcements were being hurried westward to Lord Lake, who was advancing very slowly against the French and Irish forces in Mayo.

It was not very hard for a sergeant and private in the yeomanry to get room on board of a canal boat that was leaving Dublin for Athlone.

They found a place for themselves at the stern of the boat, seats for the women, and a sheltered nook where Val slept close muffled up in Peggy's great blue cloak. Like nearly all the other passengers they carried their own provisions with them in a big basket.

All day, from hot noon to drowsy eve, the boat trailed slowly over the placid water, through endless hedge-rows, gay with wild flowers and alive with birds. The trees and houses on the banks went gliding past their boat in smooth procession, and the pleasant land seemed all at peace. Slowly they glided on, a day and night

under blue sky radiant with sunshine and black sky spangled with stars, with a faint breeze in their faces and the sleepy ceaseless ripple of the water in their ears.

The second night, at its darkest, little Val was lifted gently from his nest; yet not so gently but he woke. His mother's soft hand stilled the sleepy cry on his lips. "Lie quiet, my pet," she whispered, "don't make a sound."

It was pitch black, the stars showing like gold specks on the blackness. Only by stretching out his gun over the side, Blake felt they were running close to a grassy bank, even and firm.

But far a-head, and low down on the horizon, there were other lights twinkling which were not stars.

"It's Athlone," Christy muttered, "not a mile away. The place is full of soldiers. We have no time to lose."

Then bundles and baskets and weapons went over the side noiselessly on to the grassy bank, and one after the other, Blake first with the child in his arms, leaped from darkness into darkness, and the boat slid on through the night without them. The others followed.

Groping patiently on hands and knees they found their weapons and bundles in the black grass and gathered them into a heap.

There was a hedge half a dozen yards in from the brim of the canal, and they kept close up to it, touching the twigs lightly for guidance as they walked. So, slowly, cautiously, Blake still carrying the boy, who had again gone sound asleep, in his strong arms, they went back the way they came till they reached a bridge, and beyond it a road skirting due west.

They passed on the tow path under the bridge, keeping close to the wall, and the stars overhead went out for a moment and came again on the other side.

A sharp ascent led them from the canal bank on to the high road.

"It's the straight road for Claremorris," Blake said, as they felt its firm surface under their feet. "We should be able to get clear out of danger before dawn. You are not tired, Norah?"

"Not in the very least; but the boy?"

"He is sound asleep in my arms."

"Then I'm quite ready."

A soft hand stole under his arms.

"And you, Peggy?"

"Fresh as a two year old," she answered; "sure a twenty miles walk is child's play in our parts. But you'd better ask Christy; the cratur, sure the laste fatigue tells on him. Come along, Christy avic, give us your hand and I'll help you."

Chapter XXII

THE PARTING

"And there are sudden partings, such as press
The life from out young hearts, ah! who can guess
If ever more we'll meet those mutual eyes."

SO with brave hearts they went on through the night, down the long road where nothing stirred but themselves.

On, on; monotonously, hour after hour. The walk and the night seemed interminable. But at long last a faint grey glimmer of the dawn began to show; oozing as it were out of all the earth and sky; vague, diffused, casting no shadows. The road was now a faint grey strip under their feet, and the trees stood out vague shadows on either hand.

Swiftly the light grew from grey to white. Towards the east, half the great vault of Heaven flushed rosy red with a broad band of crimson at the horizon. Suddenly the sun's flaming edge showed and it was day, and after long darkness they saw.

But no living thing met their eyes. The first instinctive glance behind showed the long road bare for miles. They had so far escaped pursuit.

Still walking on steadily in the soft glow and cool freshness of the dawn, they came to where the road ran suddenly into the heart of a wood, with huge branches interlacing overhead; and the boy, wakened from deep sleep in his father's sheltering arms, broke out with healthy childhood's one great formula, "I'se hungry."

Where the road climbed a high shouldered bridge over a gurgling stream, they crept, one after the other, through a breach in the tangled woodbine and whitethorn of the hedge. Then on the mossy margin of the stream, under the high roof of the trees, their provender was unpacked and a hearty meal made.

Two hours' sleep; then to the road again, and so steadily on till noon, when a second stream was found and a second halt was made. They let the cold water flow over hot and tired wrists and ankles, and ate and drank and slept again in the green shade. There Maurice and Christy joyfully discarded the yeoman's uniform, which they had worn from the first with a curious sense of shame, and men and women plucked green favours from the overhanging trees, and even the little boy would have his branch of green to carry.

When the fervour of the noon was spent, they were on the road again, still trending to the west.

Twice or three times they saw the figures of peasants walking in front of them, or on either side working in the fields. They would willingly have spoken with them, for they were eager for news, but the terror of the times had reached even to this remote and peaceful region, and the figures vanished swiftly and quietly as shadows when they approached.

The western sky was all a-flame with the sunset, when a sharp turn of the road brought them at last upon the straggling outskirts of the little town of Claremorris.

Then the two men held back out of sight, whilst the two women and the child went on timidly to the first cottage by the wayside.

"God save all here!" said Peggy, at the open door of the cottage.

"God save you kindly," was the quick response.

From the front of the clear red peat fire burning on the floor, with a big black pot hung by a block hook over it, two women rose together to welcome them. The elder of the two was about forty years. The frills of her snow white cap framed a comely face, smooth and fresh coloured. The other seemed hardly half that age, though

two children, a little boy and a girl, clung to her skirts.

"May we come in?" asked Norah timidly.

"What's to hinder!" the elder woman answered. "I'm sure your ladyship is heartily welcome. Won't you draw down for a heat of the fire, the evening is turning a bit chilly, hot as the days does be. Run, Honor asthore, and get a cup of milk for the little gentleman; maybe you'd taste a drop yourself?"

"Oh! don't trouble yourself about us, please," Norah said hastily, "we don't want anything to eat. We only want a little information, if you can give it to us."

There was a sudden cooling in the manner of the countrywoman. The civility was still there, but the kindliness was gone out of voice and face when she spoke again, and in its place caution had come.

"And what information would your ladyship be wanting?"

"Where are the French troops stationed; what is the easiest and quickest way to get at them?"

"Faix! that's a quare question to ask the likes of me. What would a poor woman that never stirs out of the house from mornin' to night be knowin' about the same French. Some people

does be sayin' it's beyant in Dublin they landed, and more that they never come at all."

"We heard," Norah faltered out, "that they had come to Killala Bay."

"Sure, they couldn't come in there unknownst to us. But sure, maybe it was the herrings they were thinkin' of that told you. The bay was full of them not a fortnight ago, and——"

The red level sunlight that showed through the cottage door at Norah's back was darkened, and the woman—who faced that way—broke suddenly off with a frightened look and a warning gesture.

At the same moment a cry of joy was heard from Peggy.

"Father O'Carroll!" she called out, and Norah, turning round sharply, saw the slight figure of the priest she knew so well and loved so well, framed in the doorway clear against the red of the sunshine.

Thady O'Flynn's wild face showed for one second over the priest's shoulder and vanished.

Old age, which had so long passed Father O'Carroll by without notice, had come upon him suddenly at last. His hair had grown sparse and white at the temples, and there were deep lines about his eyes and mouth. But the old cheerfulness and courage was in his face still.

"Mrs. Blake!" he cried in surprise at sight of her, "or may I still say Norah! and Peggy too, my good friend Peggy; how in wonder's name have you come here. The little boy is yours, Norah? He has his father's eyes. Surely Maurice and Christy are not far off when you are here?"

"No further than the corner of the road. I'll go and call them."

"No, no, don't stir; Thady will go and fetch them," said Father O'Carroll, for Thady was in the cottage now, his wild face full of joy at their meeting. The priest had hardly spoken when he was off like a greyhound on his quest.

The elder countrywoman forgot everything in the fervour of her welcome to the priest, a welcome in which there was a curious blending of reverence and affection.

"Glory be to God night and day, but it's glad we are to see you, father avick. The sight of you is good for sore eyes. It's frightened to death we were all out and you so long away. Troth! it's better than six months since we heard tale or tidings of you, or saw sight or light of you, and quare stories does be goin' up and down the country as how the soldiers was huntin' you here and there. Here, Honor," she cried again to the younger woman, "bid the childer go down on their knees for the priest's blessing."

The shy young mother drew the shy children closer, and they knelt on the clay floor at the priest's feet, and he put his hand softly on the little curly pates and blessed them.

At the same moment Honor pulled the elder woman's sleeve and whispered in her ear,—

"True for you, asthore, true for you," the other woman cried briskly. "It's forgetting me manners I am, but the sight of his reverence puts me clean out of myself intirely. You'll pardon me, me lady,"—to Norah,—"if I was a bit stiff with you. Sure, I didn't know at the time that his reverence could go bail for you, me lady, and we daren't call our lives our own, and the state the country is in. Troth! the French is landed right enough, your ladyship. It's in Ballina they are by this if all accounts be true, and me own man and Honor's man—the father of the bits of children here—and two likely brothers of her own, are on the road. Faith! if the truth is to be told, there's not an able-bodied man left in the village, only the women and children, that's not off to join them."

Maurice Blake and Christy, returning with Thady at the moment, again startled her for a second into silence. But her fears vanished at the warmth of Father O'Carroll's greeting.

"Sit down, your reverence," she said; "a hun-

dred thousand welcomes for you and your friends. In two jiffs we'll have a bit of supper on the table."

She was as good as her word, for Bridges Connolly was a notable "woman of the house, who liked," she said, "to do things dacent." The resplendent rows of shining crockery ware, seldom disturbed, came down on the white, clean scrubbed surface of the table, and soon a great dish of frizzling bacon and eggs, and a big wooden bowl of potatoes, their grey jackets slashed with white, and fresh butter and new milk in abundance, were set before the hungry travellers. The two women of the house bustled about actively helpful, but they refused to take their places at the table.

"The likes of us is time enough," the elder woman said. The younger woman, overcome by shyness, said nothing.

The little peasant children on the one side, and Val on the other, shaken off from their mother's sheltering skirts, stood at first away in the corners, watchful and shy as little grey rabbits at the edge of a warren. But soon they began to make timid advances to each other, and in a little while they were all babbling away together with the sudden, frank friendship of babyhood. They told Val of their wonderful dog Captain—the most wonderful dog in the world. Poor,

commonplace, faithful cur, he might well have blushed at his own praises if he could have known. They showed him a one-legged magpie, that had the other leg bit off by a rat trap, and lived happily in captivity ever afterwards. And little Biddy even ventured on his behalf to fetch the magpie's sworn enemy—a woolly grey cat—from under the dresser. She hauled the cat out fearlessly by the tail, and, gripping it firmly round the middle, carried it across the room, with the claws all sticking out like the thorns on a briar, for the inspection and admiration of the stranger.

Meanwhile Blake and Father O'Carroll exchanged news. Blake told of triumph and defeat in gallant Wexford, and the priest of the French landing at Killala, and the rising hopes of the West.

"They are only a handful," he said, "it's true—only fifteeen hundred at most, and there are two hundred thousand British troops in Ireland. But the Frenchmen are armed and disciplined. Their leader, Humbert, is emphatically a man, and our people crowd to them daily."

"And Cloonlara, father? is it long since you were there?" Norah asked timidly.

"Just a week ago. All is at peace at Cloonlara, and in the country round it. Not the faintest

ripple of the rebellion has reached the place. Just a week ago Thady came to me there. He had escaped from New Ross, and had since then heard no news of you. But he told me of the French landing at Killala, the last chance of the movement, as it seemed to me, and, as you see, I have come to do my share of the good work. You know I am one of you"—with a smile to Blake—"you swore me in yourself. I am no fighter, but I thought I might comfort the fighters, so I came. I could readily have carried a hundred men or more with me from Cloonlara if I chose. But I had not the heart to risk it, for success at best is doubtful. I knew the vengeance that would follow failure. Indeed, I believe they would have come in spite of me if they had known, so I kept my secret. Was I right?"

"Quite right, dear friend," Blake answered earnestly. "I have kept clear of the place myself for the same reason. If we win they will share the fruits of victory. If we lose there will be enough to answer for defeat."

"They are good men in a row," Christy grumbled, jealous that his friends should have to stand out of the fighting.

"We don't want men," the priest answered quickly, "it's arms we want. The men are coming in crowds to the camp; even the supply of

pikes and pitchforks has run short. Humbert is in despair."

"I can help him in that at least," Blake cried gleefully. "There is an American schooner, *The Western Hope*, at this moment lying in Westport quays with a consignment of arms packed in flour barrels on board. They might come round by boat to Killala if I could only get a line to the captain——"

"Thady," interrupted Father O'Carroll, smiling.

"Of course; how dull I am. A note by Thady is the thing. But what am I to write on?"

Father O'Carroll took his breviary from his pocket, tore the fly leaf out, and handed it to Blake without a word, and the note was written instantly.

But it was a hard task, and needed all the priest's influence to cause Thady to start on this message, "out of the way of all the fine fighting," as he bitterly complained.

Christy's suggestion that he might be in "for the tail end of it if he made haste," was his parting consolation.

"Christy and I must make haste too," Blake said, "especially as we are not quite clear as to the way."

"I'll guide you," interposed the priest. "I'm going straight to the French camp."

"But to-night——"

"In an hour. I know every inch of the way, daylight or moonlight or no light at all. I ought to; I have been over it a score of times on foot."

"We will be ready when you are ready."

"But what of those?" the priest asked in a lower tone, with a glance where the women and children were gathered together. "The camp will be a rough place for Norah and Peggy and the child."

Blake's face darkened with anxiety.

"God knows I have thought of that," he answered anxiously; "but Norah begged so hard to come, I had not the heart to refuse. Besides, there was no place where I could safely leave them."

"Leave them here," said the priest; "they will be quite safe here—safe and comfortable. Those good people are old friends of mine. They are what we call 'strong farmers' in our part. They have a bit of freehold of their own. Indeed, they are the one family in the village who are above permanent want and occasional famine. But they have thrown in their lot heartily with their more wretched neighbours. Joyce—that's the father's name—started this morning with his son and friends to join the French. The place is clean out of danger's track, and I'll answer for the

people as for myself. They will be quite safe here, safe and welcome."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. If you doubt me, watch Mrs. Joyce's face when I tell her."

He called the elder woman to him, and spoke a few words in Irish.

Instantly she overflowed in a torrent of mellow vowels and gutturals, in which Blake could only distinguish the words "cead mille failthe," half a dozen times repeated. Her voice and face were eloquent of welcome.

Then she turned to Blake himself at last. "It's little we can do, and do our best," she said, "but they'll have the bit and sup and hearty welcome till the Lord sends you back to them with me own man and the great victory behind you, glory be to God."

Norah demurred a little at first, trembling and turning pale at the mere thought of another parting.

"For the boy's sake, my darling," her husband whispered.

She glanced where he sat with his two companions on the floor. Little Biddy was promising him a day in the hay field, and he crowed with delight.

The mother struggled with the wife in Norah's heart; she was torn between the two.

"You will be soon back, Maurice?" she whispered.

"In a few days at furthest, I trust, win or lose; but we will win this time, please God."

"Please God; please God. But Maurice, I'm full of fears. I was never quite like this before. I am shaken by the thought we shall never meet again."

"In three days' time I will be back, and we will laugh together at those foolish fears."

"Good-bye," Peggy whispered to her own man. All the fun was gone from her buxom face, but the light of a great love showed clear in her dark blue eyes. "Take care of him, Christy," she said, "for her sake and the child's. It would kill her clane out if harm came to him; and take care of yourself for my sake, asthore machree."

"Only three days," Maurice Blake whispered cheerily once again in his wife's ear, as he put the child back into her arms.

He little guessed where they should next meet and how.

Chapter XXIII

THE RACES OF CASTLEBAR

"That chainless wave and lovely land
Freedom and Nationhood demand;
Be sure the great God never planned
For slumbering slaves a home so grand.
But hark, some voice in thunder spake,
The West's awake! the West's awake!
Sing ho, hurrah, let England quake
We'll watch till death for Erin's sake."

"WE march to-morrow at daybreak," Humbert said; "I have sure news the enemy is gathering in Castlebar, under Hutchinson and Lord Lake. In audacity and surprise is our best chance."

He had welcomed Blake in curt, honest, soldier-like fashion in his lodgings in Ballina on the evening of their arrival. Humbert had met Lord Edward in Paris. He had been much struck—as all who had met him were—by the military genius of the young Irishman, and his name was now a passport for his friend to favour and confidence.

For his own part the first look at the French

general told Blake that he was a man to be relied on. His quarters were of the plainest. A truckle bed pushed away to a corner showed his sitting-room was also his bedroom. The remains of his supper of hard-boiled eggs and dried fish and coarse bread were still on the table when Blake came into the room.

The man seemed wholly indifferent to his surroundings; the maps on the table elbowed the food aside. His clothes were rough and stained and torn, his face unshaven and tanned brick-dust colour with sun and wind. Yet in the tall, strong, clumsy figure, the rugged, resolute face, there was that which begot instant confidence. Strength and hope seemed to emanate from him as heat from a fire, warming his soldiers to his own courage.

The rough face brightening at the prospect of battle, the strong voice jerking out broken English with sharp emphasis and much rolling of the "r," made Blake feel instinctively that here was a man hard to turn from his purpose.

Yet he ventured to expostulate.

"To-morrow morning is sharp work, General," he said. "The arms I told you of will be landed at Killala to-morrow or the next day. Don't you think they are worth waiting for?"

"No," Humbert answered bluntly; "they would be of embarrassment, not of service, until your Irish

have learned to use them. For that there is not the time now; hereafter, perhaps. They do not know the guns. It was yesterday one man shot himself, and another his good friend with a gun that one gave to him. What you call the pikes and the pitchforks and the scythes are the weapons for which they are skilled. It is a pity. It is much of a pity, I deny it not; for with a little training, oh, so little, they are soldiers very superb. But as you tell me it was in Wexford, so here, they will fight best with the weapons they know. But still it is unfortunate. They might be of soldiers the best; and behold, they are but the tillers of the soil, no more."

For Humbert held devoutly to Napoleon's creed, that the best use a man could be put to was to make a soldier of him, and teach him how to kill or die according to the rules of the great game.

All this was something of a disappointment to Blake, who had prided himself a little on his foresight. It almost seemed to him at the moment as if the arms and the schooner that carried them might just as well have waited at the far side of the Atlantic. He changed his mind on that point later on.

In spite of his disappointment, his quick, clear judgment showed him that the Frenchman was right; and he gladly accepted command of a body

of rough fishermen and farmers, in whose strong hands the pike, scythe, and fishing-spear and pitch-fork were deadly weapons.

As Blake marched out of Ballina that evening, at the head of his rugged company, strong as oxen, active as goats, stepping with a long, light stride, that now and again from sheer impatience broke into a run, he had no fear of the result, if he could only carry his men within striking distance of the enemy.

The French troops were small men for the most part, dried and worn to mere bone and muscle by hot suns and hard service, but they moved with the even precision of machines, and were as impervious to fatigue.

All through the night they marched over rough ways that the enemy had deemed impossible. Fifteen full hours were spent on this untiring tramp. In the grey dawn the front rank caught sight of the town of Castlebar.

The white mists of the late autumn were thick on land and sea and sky, but they melted and cleared as the sun gained strength.

In the distance the great peak of Croaghpatrick loomed momentarily clearer. The white mist rolled in fleecy masses down its steep sides, and its high, bald head stood sharp-outlined against the blue sky

The hope of surprising the enemy had failed. The mist parting, like the rising curtain to some great spectacle, showed the British forces strongly posted on the heights on the hither side of Castlebar, covered on one flank by a lake, and on the other by an impenetrable morass. An army of six thousand infantry, two thousand cavalry, horse and men vigorous and refreshed by a long night's rest and ample food, perched securely on the hillside, awaited the attack of seven hundred French and five hundred undisciplined Irish recruits, all weary and footsore from a fifteen hours' march and sleepless night. The British forces were fully equipped with artillery; the French had but two small cannon, which the peasants had hauled with them in their night's march over the mountains.

The position which the British occupied might well appear impregnable even to superior forces. The attack must be delivered up a long, steep slope, swept by the enemy's artillery.

Yet the Irish or French leaders or men never faltered for a moment.

Lean and short of stature the French troops looked little more than boys, but in their stern, war-worn faces there was the desperate courage of men who had made war the business and the pastime of their lives. Their uniforms were indeed torn and travel-stained and blood-stained;

but the fringe of bayonet points along the line was bright and keen.

"Hold your fire; trust the bayonet!" Humbert cried as he rode to the front. Then, evenly and steadily as a tidal wave, they swept up the long incline.

"Surely they will never venture to attack?" said Lord Lake to Lord Carhampton, who rode beside him.

"It would be utter madness," Lord Carhampton responded, but both men glanced back uneasily over their shoulders to see the coast was clear. For the French and Irish still came steadily on.

At once the artillery at the extreme right opened fire and bowled the round shot down the hill; but the balls struck short, ripped the earth, and rebounded high over the bent ranks, that, without halt or pause, climbed steadily on. The French were half way up the steep ascent, with the Irish recruits leading a little on their left, when one of the British guns found the range at last.

A ball came plump into their lines and cut a clean gap through, carrying four men down hill — dead.

Humbert rode along the line in front, heedless of the roaring guns, to where Blake climbed with the Irish mountaineers. In that wild din no human voice might be heard. But he pointed with

his sword to the deadly battery, and Blake with a nod accepted the desperate task.

"Come on, boys; first to the top!" he shouted through a brief lull in the cannonade, and he broke into a run with Christy at his side. The shout that answered him was swallowed up in the renewed roar of the artillery. But the Irish—active as goats and as reckless—leaped forward after him. Their ranks were luckily broken by their reckless speed, so the wild fire which the battery now turned wholly on them was almost without effect. They were scarcely two hundred yards off from the cannon, when the cavalry, like an avalanche loosed from the crest of the hill, came thundering down upon them.

But they quickly leaped, each man for himself, nimbly aside from the direct attack, and with their long pikes, hook and blade, they cut the reins or struck the riders from the saddle as the horses went plunging past them down the steep decline. Then with scarce a pause they formed and charged again.

A moment more and they are amongst the guns, slashing and stabbing furiously with scythe and pike and pitch fork, and the battery is silenced.

Meanwhile, steadily, swiftly the even line of French veterans climb the slope. The British

shoot wild and wide in their abject terror of the foe that comes upon them inevitable as death.

Twenty yards off, Humbert's voice is heard at last, "Fire!" A crashing volley, a level storm of lead leaps out from their guns, tearing the opposing ranks to pieces.

Again the leader's voice rang out, dominating the roar of battle, "Charge!"

The bayonet points glittering through the curtain of smoke, the French came with a rush.

At the first prod of cold steel the British line melted and broke and fled. Like sheep driven by the dogs they went headlong—a wild, mad crowd —down the slope towards the town, with the French bayonet points pressing close at their rear.

The battle had lasted just five minutes by the clock.

"The d——d cowards!" cried Lord Lake as he glanced back over his shoulder at the rout. He plunged his spurs deeper into his horse's side as he spoke, and was himself first into the town and out of it on the other side.

Lord Carhampton was less fortunate. The Irish, under Blake, leaving the deserted guns had joined in the pursuit, herding the flock of armed cowards for the town, as dogs herd sheep into a pen. Up and down the steep and narrow streets of Castle-

bar the flying ranks are driven, trampling each other in their eagerness to escape the thirsty bayonets in avenging hands behind. As Blake and Christy came side by side down a narrow lane, they saw a horseman in front spurring recklessly through the frightened throng. An angry foot-soldier, struck by the runaway, prodded the plunging horse in the neck with his bayonet. The steel barely raised the skin but the frightened brute reared, lost his footing on the slippery cobble-stones, and came down in a sprawling heap, catching his rider's leg under the saddle.

Christy's bayonet point was but a foot from the back of the prostrate man when Blake put the steel aside.

"Give the poor devil a chance," he said; "I'm sick of this slaughter."

Even as he spoke the horse stumbled to his feet again, the rider scrambled into the saddle and was off at a gallop. But as he looked back over his shoulder with a grin, half malice, half terror, showing the evil face of Lord Carhampton, Blake fingered his pistol butt longingly, half repenting of his pity. A feather-weight pressure of his finger on the trigger meant death; but the man went on unharmed, for good or evil as might chance.

"He will win the race to Tuam," Christy mut-

tered as he saw the horseman again plunge recklessly through the flying crowd.

"Monsieur, you have reason," said a young French officer at his side, while he wiped his blood-smeared sword carefully on the body of a dead Hessian, and replaced it in the scabbard. "It's not zee battle of which we have taken part but zee races. When people speak in zee aftertime it will be called, 'zee races of Castlebar.'"

Chapter XXIV

THE CHAMPIONS OF LAW AND ORDER

"Then women's shriek was heard in vain,
Nor infancy's unpitied pain,
More than the warrior's groan could gain,
Respite from ruthless butchery."

EARLY next morning, with light hearts, Blake and Christy rode briskly out of Castlebar in the track of the flying enemy. Though pursuit had ceased at the end of the town, for three or four miles further the broad road was strewn with the weapons which the cowards had thrown aside to lighten their flight. Here and there amongst them was the body of a man or horse that had floundered and died in their first mad panic of pursuit.

But after a while these tokens of terror grew less and disappeared. Half a dozen miles from Castlebar all traces of the defeated army were lost.

Not all!

Even while Blake answered laughingly to

Christy, who still grumbled that he had not been let put his bayonet into Carhampton, the sharp cry, "My God! what's that?" broke involuntarily from his lips, and a quick jerk of the bridle brought his horse to the road side. There, amid the lush grass an old man in peasant's dress was stretched stark dead, his white head seamed with a deep sabre gash. A little further on lay a young woman—his daughter, seemingly—with her clothes torn and disordered, and her face bruised. She too was stone dead, with a bayonet thrust between her breasts.

The men's blood was stirred to wild rage as they looked; a rage that chilled to sudden fear for those they loved.

"The villains!" Christy muttered through his teeth, "the d——d infernal cowardly butchers that dared not stand five minutes before men with weapons in their hands."

"I pray God," Blake began with pale face and quivering lips. But he dare not put the thought in his heart into words; he could not finish the prayer.

"Ride on!" he cried fiercely; and they left the dead where they lay, and rode away with slackened rein and spurring heel. Side by side they rode, but spoke no word. The same horrible fear was heavy in both their hearts.

Faster and faster their horses' galloping hoofs rang with a monotonous rhythm on the hard, dry road. Faster and faster, but still their fears flew on in front to the little village where their nearest and dearest lay right in the track of the flying foe.

At last! at last! the steeple of the little church showed a clean sharp point through the embowering trees as they climbed a slope of the road. A moment more they should know the best—or worst. At the next turn they drew rein suddenly and gazed before them in bleak despair. The horror of that awful moment never wholly left their hearts. Long years afterwards the mere remembrance of it made their blood run cold.

The village was in ruins. Here and there, the sole thing that stirred in that desolate picture, sluggish smoke surged slowly skywards from blackened walls. Of life there was no sign.

The pause was but a moment, the next they struck spurs in their horses' sides and raced headlong down the steep narrow empty streets of the village. With a fierce wrench of the reins they pulled their horses on their haunches, and leaped to the ground in front of a larger ruin than the rest, just where the village opened into the country.

The sharp, black angles of the gables alone

peered through the heavy cloud of smoke that enveloped the Joyces' ruined cottage, oozing slowly from the charred thatch and blackened rafters of the fallen roof. Here and there a patch or streak of dull red in the heap of ruins showed the fire still smouldered.

The two strong men gazed blankly on blackened wall and smoky roof, helpless, hopeless, powerless: bewildered as frightened children, stunned by the blow.

Then, with a half articulate cry, Maurice broke through the smoke and smouldering fire into the cottage.

Almost at the threshold he stumbled over something soft and warm, and drew it forth tremblingly. It was the half-charred body of the elder woman, who a few days before had welcomed them so heartily to her humble home. Her skull was cloven and her right arm almost severed from the shoulder. She had fallen forward, and though her clothes and hair were charred to ashes, her comely face, untouched by the fire, bore no trace of fear or pain. Merciful death had struck her unawares.

While Blake knelt beside the body with an unspoken prayer in his heart, a sudden cry from Christy called him to a far corner of the yard.

There lay the younger of the two women prone

on her back in the face of the blistering sun, staring up at the blue sky with wide-open eyes that saw nothing. Her little boy was clasped close in her arms. The same bayonet thrust had passed through mother and child.

A little way off the baby girl lay in a tumbled heap, its head shattered to pieces by a savage blow. Their young lives, with all their hopes and happiness, were sped in one moment of reckless savagery.

Pity and rage were in those men's hearts as they gazed, but horror most of all. They searched the yard and outhouses, fearing to find what they sought. Their search was quite in vain.

"The ruins next," cried Maurice. But as he turned towards them he became conscious of a movement in the big rick of turf that stood at the end of the yard, only a few paces off.

Even as they looked the centre of the rick shook and fell in an avalanche of sods, and in the midst of the ruin stood Peggy, her face pale as death, her eyes blazing with excitement.

"Peggy, acushla machree!" Christy cried, and clasped her in his arms. Then there was a storm of incoherent questioning. The poor girl forced back the rising tears and strove to answer them, but she was excited, bewildered, incapable of speech.

"Let me be, for the love of God!" she faltered. "Don't you see I'm half-mad with what I've been through. If ye won't let me tell me story me own way, I cannot tell it at all."

"Are Norah and my boy living?" Blake asked in a hoarse whisper; "tell me that first of all, yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Thank God!" he answered fervently.

But the answer had come from the woman's white lips like a sob, and she cast a swift pitying glance on him as she told her story in short, jerky sentences, broken with sobs.

"Last evening about sundown I was away in the far field giving a hand to milk the cows when I heard a sudden sound of roarin' and screamin' about the place, and the next minute I saw the smoke go up from the house. I flung down the milking pail and ran across the field as hard as my legs could carry me, for me heart was in me mouth with fear for herself and the child.

"I had hardly got to the gate when I saw Honor Joyce come running down the yard with one child in her arms, and the other by the hand, and two soldiers after her. I was as close as I am to you very near. I saw the first soldier draw back his arm and stab her through the back. As he jerked

the weapon out she fell, still holding the baby tight in her arms, and he stabbed her again through the bosom.

"The child she had by the hand rolled over and over on the ground as the mother fell, and the second soldier came up and brained it with his musket butt. I wasn't ten yards off. I saw it all; God help me! I saw it all."

Poor Peggy's voice broke in sobs at the remembrance; her whole body quivered, but the brave heart sustained her still.

After a moment she went on more steadily, "At the back of the rick there was a big breach where they took the turf, and I crept in and flung back the sods till the breach was filled up behind me, and the wall in front, so thin that I could see through the crevices into the yard. At that moment I saw her rush out of the house with the boy."

No need to say who was meant—Blake's heart ceased beating as he listened.

"The two soldiers saw her at the same time, and made a rush with bayonets dripping blood. She had a pistol in her right hand, and she raised it as they came. They stood stock still for a moment—cowed."

"My brave girl!" the husband muttered; "she never fired a pistol in her life."

"That moment saved her. There was a trampling of horses' feet, and two men rode through the gate behind. She could not see them, though I could, and she stood still with the pistol pointed facing the enemy in front of her. But the soldiers let the bayonets' point drop at the first sight of the foremost horseman, whose uniform, all red and gold, was blazing in the sunshine."

"'Halloa! boys,' he shouted, with a loud laugh out of him, 'pig-sticking again!' and he rolled his eyes round to where the bodies lay bleeding. 'They really are too fond of bayonet practice, Jenkins. By God! there's a vixen for you,' he broke off under his breath, when at last he caught sight of herself, and the pointed pistol.

"While he spoke the other man—Jenkins—who seemed his servant like, came quietly behind and struck the pistol up out of her hand.

"She turned with a sharp cry, and then the general saw her face for the first time. I could see the start it took out of him.

"'Miss Denvir!' he shouted. 'I beg pardon, Mrs. Blake I should say. Have no fear; you are quite safe.'

"At the words the two ruffians skulked away, and she turned and faced him boldly, still clasping the boy tight.

"'My lord,' she cried proudly, though she was

all in a tremble, 'you have reason to be proud of your butchers.'

"But he put her words off with a wave of his hand, 'Madam,' he answered, 'war has its license. Your husband is a notorious rebel. But we wage no war with women. You are quite safe.'

"'And my boy?'

"He thought for a moment.

"'And your boy. His safety rests with yourself.'

"'My lord! you are——'

"'Now, as always, your most obedient servant, madam.'

"Her eyes met his for a moment, and she turned her head away.

"He went on with his speech in a soft sluderin' voice, smilin' to himself while he spoke.

"'Those scenes of rough war are not for a lady's eye. You are my prisoner, Mrs. Blake, but you will be treated with every possible consideration. I will myself see to your comfort and the punishment of those by whom you have been molested. 'Jenkins,'—he turned to his man—'have those two fellows hanged as soon as possible. Discipline must be preserved. Then help to get our men together. We march for Tuam within an hour. It's not safe to loiter with those d——d cowardly rebels and those French demons so close behind.'

"My first thought," Peggy went on, quickly, almost feverishly, "was that let what would happen I MUST go with her. But then I remembered you two. You would find the dead bodies when you came. You would guess the worst had happened. That thought steadied me, so I lay still and waited. It was a long, dreary wait; I thought you would never come; never come." Her voice died to a whisper. The reaction from the long strain came at last, and she dropped in a dead faint.

But the vigorous life in her soon revived. They made her eat and drink while the horses were got ready for the road, and in half an hour from the halt they were on their way again.

"One word more, Peggy?" asked Blake before they started; "can you tell me the man's name?"

"I didn't rightly hear the word," she said, "but he was a little, dark, ugly man, with black hair and whiskers, just frosted with white."

"Lord Carhampton!" cried Blake and Christy together. "Thank God I threw up your bayonet point yesterday," Blake added earnestly.

They rode steadily through the thick gathering dusk towards Tuam; Peggy sitting beside her husband, with arms clasped tight round his waist.

Blake still kept a few paces in front, boiling with impatience. But hope was still strong in

him. The news of the safety of wife and child in the very moment of his despair warmed his heart like wine. They would be well treated, he mused; the tide of battle had turned at last. The Frenchmen were coming, and their rescue could not be long delayed. Meanwhile, they were quite safe; quite safe.

So he told himself over and over again as he rode along, in that glad assurance half forgetting the horrors he had seen. Unconsciously he hummed the refrain of an American war song under his breath, and the notes came back on the still air to the ears of those behind.

"God help him!" Peggy whispered to her husband. "He doesn't know; he didn't see the look on that man's face as he followed her. There's worse than death threatening, and I daren't tell him; I daren't."

Chapter XXV

WOMAN'S WILE

"'Tis his to do and hers to plan,
And she obeys when he commands,
Poor, simple thing! yet cunning man
Is but a baby in her hands."

IT was black dark when they came, riding slowly and cautiously, for their horses were spent with fatigue, down the long, sloping road that led into the town of Tuam, where the loyalist troops had lit in their flight, like frightened birds ready, to start again at the first sight or sound of the enemy.

The town was still wide awake. Lights twinkled here and there, and made a kind of yellow haze in the dark sky over the town. The laughter, shouts, and curses of the licentious soldiery came distinctly to their ears, with now and again a shrill shriek of fear or pain.

Up to this they had ridden, all three, with the one thought in their minds,—to get there. Now for the first time the difficulty, the danger, the seeming madness of an attempt at rescue, dawned on

them. They must pluck the woman and child from the midst of this camp of ferocious and desperate men.

Half way down the slope to the town Christy drew rein, and the tired horse readily obeyed.

"What next?" he asked, turning to Blake.

"Straight on, to take our chance."

"And get shot or stabbed like fools for our pains."

"We must run the risk of that," Blake answered hotly; "our work is not to be done without danger."

"We must run as little risk as we can for their sake. Our deaths won't help them, our lives may. We have to find Carhampton's quarters, get into them ourselves, and get them out. It needs caution and cunning as well as courage for a job like that."

All through the discussion Peggy had listened silently. Indeed, through the long ride she had hardly spoken at all, dazed by the horror of the scene she had just witnessed. But she spoke now at last.

"I have been thinking of a way," she said timidly, and stopped short.

"Out with it, my girl," Christy cried.

Very briefly she put her plan before them.

"Not a bad notion," Christy muttered, "but I'm

afraid it is too risky for him; it's running his head right into the lion's jaws."

"Bravo! Peggy," Blake interposed decidedly; "you have shown us a clear road in and out. There is no danger, absolutely none. If we play our parts well our plan cannot fail."

"So you're not going straight down to the town?" Christy asked innocently.

"Not to-night. We have five miles more to ride if the horses can do it. Away to the right there's a wooded hill, called Castlehackett. I know the place well. The fairies are in charge of it. We will be quite safe from intruders there."

"That's true for you," said Peggy; "the good people are better than a watch dog to keep busy bodies off."

"Barrin' treachery," Christy said with a grin. "You can't tell who is to be trusted these times."

About noon the next day a buxom country girl, gaily-dressed in plaid shawl and bright red petticoat, came walking briskly up the main street of Tuam.

"Here comes a gay lass, Jem!" cried a yeoman, who had just stepped out of a public house in the main street, wiping his lips with his sleeve.

The sharp twang of the North of Ireland accent was in his voice. He was a tall, raw-boned shambling fellow, with high cheekbones, and hair and

whiskers the colour of unbleached flax, and there was an ugly leer in his watery blue eyes as he gazed greedily at the girl.

"It would go hard with her," his comrade said, an unlicked recruit, scarce twenty years of age, "if you caught her in a lonely place, Jack."

"That would be as the wench might take it," the other answered with a low chuckle; "she looks a lass that would like a bit of fun."

There was certainly no shyness about her, for she walked straight up to where the two soldiers stood leering in the doorway of the public house.

"Where does Lord Carhampton lodge, if ye plaze?" she asked boldly.

"What would you give to know, my dear?" replied the fellow called Jack.

"I'd thank you for a civil answer to a civil question," she retorted, turning to his comrade.

Jack made a grab at her to rifle a kiss.

She slipped from his circling arm, and the same moment she dealt him a ringing box on the ear.

The brute's sallow face flushed with rage, and he raised his clenched hand to strike back.

But his comrade shouted with laughter, and two or three other men—a sergeant amongst them—came running across the street.

"Serve you d——d right, Jack," said the sergeant, who was plainly a bit of a dandy in his

way. "The girl is meat for your masters." Then to the girl, "You were looking for me, my dear?"

"I was looking for Lord Carhampton," she answered shortly, "and I have no time for this foolin'. I have news for his lordship that he won't thank you to keep waitin'."

"Meat for your master, sergeant," retorted one of the soldiers maliciously.

"True for you, Perkins," laughed the sergeant good-humouredly, "we must all wait till the general is served. Come along, my girl. I'll bring you to his lordship; he'd rather meet the likes of you than the French army any day, or night for that matter. But don't give them all away; keep one little kiss for my share."

Past the beautiful stone cross in the market place, in the centre of the town, they walked together down a long narrow street, and over a bridge that spanned a shallow stream, and came at the outskirts of the town to a double iron gate, where two sentries were posted.

"These are his lordship's quarters," the sergeant said, as he gave the word and passed through. "It's nice and lonely you see, my dear. His lordship don't want busybodies about. You won't be the only good-looking woman on the premises either; but you needn't tell him I told you that."

Lord Carhampton, in full uniform, was walking hastily up and down the drawing-room of the house, whose three windows looked out on a wide, old-fashioned garden, filled with fruit trees and fenced with a high stone wall.

He stopped abruptly, facing the door, when the sergeant and the country girl entered. The quick impatient frown passed in a moment from his swarthy brow.

"Well, sergeant," he said, well-pleased, stroking his grizzly moustache, "what's this you've brought me? a prisoner I suppose?"

But the girl took the word out of the mouth of the man.

"No, your lordship," she answered sharply, "but one that may find you a prisoner worth having, if you make it worth her while."

"Well! well! my lass; who is this famous prisoner of yours?"

"His name is for your lordship's ears alone."

"You can go, sergeant," Carhampton said, and the sergeant left the room, grinning discreetly.

"By jove, you did that neatly," said his lordship, as the door closed and he turned the key in the lock. "I never mind being left alone with a good looking lass like yourself for business or pleasure."

He came towards her with flushed face, speaking

thickly, as if he had been drinking, though he was quite sober as far as wine went.

"The name of the prisoner——" she began.

"Oh! d——n the prisoner!" He was close up to her now, with hands outstretched.

"Is Maurice Blake."

He stopped short as if he were shot.

"Maurice Blake!" he cried in amazement; "you don't say so?"

"But I do say it."

"You can help me to catch him?"

"I can give him into your very hands."

"How? when?"

"When your lordship makes it worth my while."

"I'll give fifty guineas to lay hands on him."

"Your lordship must double that."

He looked at her sharply for a moment.

"That's business," he said. "You have a sharp eye for the main chance, my lass. Well, I'll give the hundred."

"There's something else."

"I thought so. Well, what's the extra?"

"There's a man to be pardoned and promoted over the business."

"More money for him?"

"No, we share the money between us."

"He's a lucky lad to have a lass like you to beg

for him," his lordship said with a leer; "you mean to share more than the money, I dare swear. Well, what's the fellow's name?"

"Sergeant Saunders."

"Saunders! Saunders!" muttered Lord Carhampton, "I know no man of that name." Suddenly his black brows gathered in a scowl. "Oh! d——n the fellow! I remember him now. I thought he was dead. He was in charge of this same Blake at Ross, and let him slip through his fingers. I'd have hanged him for it if I caught him."

"Hanging is for Papists, my lord," she answered saucily. "Sergeant Saunders is a good Orangeman. Your lordship knows that."

"I know nothing of the kind. I thought him a stalwart once on a time. He was a neat hand with pitch-cap or cat-o'-nine-tails and a terror of the croppies, the last man I'd have suspected of letting one of them give leg bail."

"The best man is beat sometimes."

"But why did this fellow—what's his name—Saunders, sneak away himself?"

"Can your lordship ask that? you said just now you'd have him hanged if you caught him. Well he did not want to be hanged; that's all. What would you say if I told you that he has stuck to the rebel night and day ever since? What would

you say if I told you that he sluthered him and talked him over, letting on to be a rebel himself, and that the pair of them are as thick as thieves this present moment."

"I'd say it was a parcel of d——d lies."

"If he can show you where the rebel is, and how to nab him without a blow struck?"

"By Jove! that would change things. Can he do that. When?"

"To-night if your lordship is ready."

"Mind what you are about, girl." His lordship was excited. His air of careless gallantry disappeared. He caught her roughly by the wrists and drew her close to him, and stared into her face searchingly. She met his look without flinching.

"This may be some trap?" he growled. "What security can this fellow Saunders give?"

"His own life and mine at the back of it. You cannot ask fairer than that. Unarmed, bound if you like, with a pistol at his head, he will lead your men straight to the rebel's hiding place. That's what he bid me say to you."

"And you'll stay here till we return?"

"I'll stay here and welcome."

"But this Blake is a tough customer," and he hesitated for a moment and stammered, "I have a particular reason for wanting to take him alive."

"That's easy managed. Don't I tell you he

trusts to Saunders like a brother. It will be an easy matter to break his sword in the scabbard, and draw his pistol charges."

He looked at her admiringly. "By Jove! you are the devil of a woman. You have an answer for everything. But, remember this, if your sweetheart breaks down by accident or design! I don't care a d——n which, you'll have a corpse for a sweetheart, and you like your sweethearts warm and lively, I suspect."

"There's more than one man in the world anyhow," she answered with an alluring flash of the dark eyes.

"Ha! that's your style is it? 'Le Roi est mort; Vive le Roi.' Well, if I can't pay you out one way, I'll find another."

"A hundred guineas," she said demurely.

"You little skinflint!"

"Is it a bargain?"

"A bargain. We'll sign and seal it, my dear."

But she slipped like an eel from his grasp to the further side of the broad table.

"Business first, my lord," she said with a provoking smile.

"And pleasure afterwards," he added with a leer. "I'll see the proverb is not left unfinished. Meantime send that scamp of yours here as soon as you can, or, better still, bring him with you."

Chapter XXVI

THE CAPTIVE

"Who shall be trusted now, if one's right hand
Is perjured to the shoulder."

AT nine o'clock the same evening, before the moon had shown over the horizon, a party of a dozen men, all armed to the teeth, marched quietly out from Tuam along the road that led to the hill of Castlehacket. A tall gaunt man walked at the head of the troop between two soldiers, each of whom held a loaded pistol to his head.

At the rear was Lord Carhampton himself on horseback. Before starting he had briefly cautioned the guide.

"Saunders," he said, "you are playing for a big stake, and you must take risks. If this is a trick of yours, you won't live to enjoy the fun of it, I promise you."

The other assented as curtly. "I'll take my chance, my lord. I don't mean to fail in the job I have before me."

Only the muffled tread of many feet was heard as the men went forward cautiously through the darkness, keeping on the grassy margin of the road. Presently the moon rose, at first a huge red bonfire, at the edge of the horizon, changing as it rose to a great globe of pure silver and filling the wide spaces of the night with white light and black shadow.

Six miles from the town they came abreast of the hill which stood out on the left hand a dark cone against the clear moonlit sky. Overhead the trees were thickly interlaced, and the wood stretched away in long dim vistas, with here and there white specks of moonlight shining through.

A wild and lovely scene! No wonder the fairies had chosen it for their haunts, and human kind abandoned it to their keeping.

Only in the dim moon—in those woods it was always dim and cool—the children of the neighbouring villages came in search of nuts, for the woods were rich in hazel trees. For the rest the place was wholly abandoned to the good people, and the story went that on still moonlight nights the music of the fairy piper might be heard shrill and sweet far up the lonely hillside.

On that steep slope the trees grew closer, strongly interlaced with hazel trees and sweet briar. The place was inexpressibly lonely. Even the wild

things of the woods were tamer there. The birds clung like clusters of fruit on the lower branches of the trees, and never so much as fluttered when the soldiers pushed their way through a few yards below them.

It was hard work, and Lord Carhampton was hot and nervous before it was half over. If the guide wished to escape, now was his time. He might quite easily have broken away through the darkness, but he kept his place steadily and coolly in spite of the added risk that in the scramble through the thick undergrowth the loaded pistols pointed at his head might accidentally explode.

Without a word spoken on either side he led the troop along a half obliterated track that ran like a snake up the side of the hill.

All at once he stopped, crouching close to the ground, and the soldiers stopped and crouched with him.

"Look there!" he said in a whisper.

Through an opening of the trees in front, scarcely a hundred yards away, they saw a hundred tiny sparks of red lights, like fire flies.

"It's something not right," said John Irvine, one of the men with the pistols, superstitiously. He had heard the stories of the fairies and believed them fervently.

"It's right enough," the guide answered with a

note of contempt in his voice, "the man we want is there. He's built himself a hut of loose stones; that's the light of his fire showing through the cracks. He trusts the fairies to keep fools like you from peeping and prying."

"You'd best keep a civil tongue in your head," retorted the fellow, savagely digging the muzzle of the loaded pistol into his side. "For three straws I'd——"

He broke off abruptly with a growl of pain, for Lord Carhampton, who had crept cautiously to the front to find the meaning of the sudden halt, struck him with the hilt of his sword on the mouth.

His lordship was nervously excited to find himself so near the man he sought and hated.

"He's a d——d dangerous and treacherous fellow," he whispered to the guide; "we must not give him a chance at resistance or escape."

"Your best plan, my lord," the guide answered gruffly, "is to let three or four fellows creep quietly up to the wall and poke the tops of their guns through the crevices. At a given word let them blaze away together; they can't miss."

"I told you, man, a dozen times," Lord Carhampton impatiently interrupted, "that I wanted to take the fellow alive."

"Then take him alive," the guide said coolly.

"There's no danger. I have drawn the pistol charges as I promised and broken his sword."

Still Lord Carhampton was not quite satisfied. "Even if you speak the truth," he said, "the fellow may have found the trick out and loaded again and found another sword. Stop! I've got a plan. The rebel still trusts you."

The guide nodded sulkily. "I suppose so. Unless, as you say, he has found out."

"You must take your chance for that, my man. Here's my plan. We will surround the place, as you suggest, with loaded muskets ready on full cock. Then we turn you into the hut to take our man quietly. If you have done as you say there is no danger. If you haven't you will probably get shot by the rebel or the loyalist, as the case may be."

"I don't like the notion," the other grumbled. "It will go hard with me if he suspects."

"It will go harder if we suspect," said Lord Carhampton grimly.

"I'll do it," Saunders muttered after a pause; "I took the job in hands and I'll go through with it like a man."

"Like a d——d Judas," the burly Irvine growled between his teeth; "I'd like to get the chance to put a bullet through you."

Very cautiously the men crept closer to the

hut of loose stones, through which the light glittered.

It was a mere shell thatched with straw, with a wide open space in front, a doorway without a door, through which the red glare of the fire showed until it merged and was lost in the moonlight.

Half the troop crept forward and stationed themselves with guns ready round the thin, open-work walls of the hut. The remainder, with Lord Carhampton, crawled cautiously through the underwood with eyes and guns upon the open doorway, through which they could see a solitary figure seated by the blazing logs.

When they had come so close that Carhampton made quite sure that the man he saw was the man he wanted, they cut the thongs with which Saunders' wrists were bound and loosed him on his victim.

He went straight along the band of light to the open doorway. So near were the soldiers, they could hear and see all that passed between the men. Before Saunders had taken three heavy steps amongst the crackling underwood, the solitary figure in the hut leaped from his seat and stared out into the night with hand ready on the pistol butt at his belt. But the next instant he recognised and welcomed his visitor.

The soldiers could see the two men clasp hands like friends. They heard Blake's voice ask for the news, and saw Saunders bend over and whisper some words in his ear. But in the same instant he sprang with the spring of a wild beast at his comrade's throat. So fierce was the assault and so sudden that Blake went down on his back and the other fell atop, with desperate hands still clutching at his victim's throat. Before the soldiers could rush to part them, Blake's right hand stole to his belt, and a sudden explosion shook the silent night.

Saunders was unhurt by the shot, but his rage seemed suddenly to master him. He reached for the pistol that had slipped from the other's hand, caught the long barrel, and raised the heavy butt over the defenceless head of his victim in act to strike. But before the blow fell the soldiers pushed him roughly from the prostrate body. In a trice Blake, bound and gagged, by hands well used to the work, lay motionless, helpless, speechless in their midst.

Chapter XXVII

THE CAPTOR CAPTIVE

"Beware! one turn of Fortune's wheel can fling
The highest down, and raise the lowliest."

"WELL, my lass?" Lord Carhampton asked with easy insolence; "come about your money?"

He was smoking after breakfast, stretched lazily back in the recesses of a great easy chair, when the sprightly peasant girl of the day before was shown into the room, and the servant discreetly closed the door behind her.

She looked nervous and excited. "No," she answered shortly; "I came about my man. He didn't get home last night."

"That was not his fault, my beauty," his lordship answered with a grin. "He wanted to go very much indeed, and I don't blame him for that, but we induced him to stay."

"You failed then?" She could not hide the quiver of anxiety in her voice.

"No, my dear; we succeeded. Our rebel is

locked close in a room upstairs, and your sergeant—he's a sergeant again—is in charge of him. He did his work well."

Her face brightened at the news. She laughed a low, well-satisfied laugh. "What about my money?" she asked.

It was his turn to laugh. "What a pertinacious little beggar it is," he said, and wheeled his chair round that he might face her fully. "Is it the money or the man you want most, my lass?"

"Both," she answered saucily.

"You're too pretty and too lively, my dear, for that hang-dog fellow that might be your father."

"Men were scarce where I was reared. First come, first served; and he came first."

"A common soldier!"

"A sergeant, if your lordship plazes."

He laughed again at her frank impudence. "What would you say to me now if I made him a lieutenant for you?"

"I don't know what I'd say."

"What would you do for me then?"

"I don't know what I'd do."

"Well, well, my sweet mistress Innocence, I'll show you all in good time. Gratitude is a virtue, and I like to encourage it. Meanwhile, we'll find room for you here."

"I won't stay without my man to take care of me."

"Have no fear; I'll find you a man—to take care of you."

"But I want my own man. He'd be as cross as two sticks afterwards."

"But we cannot have that great gawk shambling after you all over the place."

"You can keep him close to his work, can't you? out of harm's way, guarding the rebel?"

She flashed him a quick look from the corners of her bright eyes as she spoke.

He laughed a loud, coarse laugh. "By Jove! you're right, my wench. Let him guard the rebel he caught. It will be killing two birds with one stone, and Saunders is not likely to let him slip through his fingers a second time, I should think. There's a job, too, for you, my lively lass: business first, as you say. I have got a little brat of a boy on my hands, a son of this same rebel. Our soldiers are rough nurses, I fear. They forget to warm his pap or rock his cradle sometimes, and they might be tempted to stir him up with a bayonet. I want you to look after him for me."

"But the mother?" she objected.

"I'll look after the mother myself," he answered with a leer. "You'll find the child loose somewhere about the house, and——"

She dropped him a curtsey, flashed him a bright smile and vanished, leaving him with a vague feeling of disappointment at her sudden disappearance. Then his mood changed, and he paced the long room with quick, angry strides.

"Curse that white-faced mope upstairs!" he growled, "with her virtuous heroics. I don't know why I should worry my head about her, as if there were only one woman in the world. Here's a gay country lass, plump as a partridge and as tasty, that is ready to jump into my arms if I only say the word. Yet this cold, calm dame, with her snow face and ice blood, has caught hold of me, body and soul. The airs she gives herself! I was half-afraid to speak to her at first, and when I did speak, egad! she flew into a rage and ordered me out of my own room like a tragedy queen; and I went, that's the wonder of it; sneaked off! like a whipped cur, and heard the door banged and locked behind me before I knew where I was. She was always like that, I remember, even as a girl—the very devil for pride and prudery. But, by God! I'll master her yet. The devil dealt me a trump card last night. I'll bring her whining to my feet for mercy on her rebel husband, and then—I'll name my own ransom."

He sat down at a table with letter paper before

him, and wrote a few lines in a big, scrawling hand, folded and sealed it.

"Take this," he said to the orderly who entered the room in answer to the sharp clang of the handbell, "take this to the lady——"

He paused, changed his mind, and abruptly tore the letter to pieces, and flung the pieces in the grate.

Turning suddenly he saw the grin broadening on the face of the orderly, for his lordship's character was known to the meanest soldier in the army.

"Get out, you blockhead!" he shouted savagely; "don't stand grinning there like a fool. I'll try if a turn on the triangle will cure you of the disease."

The fellow crept away quite cowed, and the general marched into his dressing-room.

Half an hour later, spick and span in undress uniform, he knocked sharply at the door of the room where Norah sat, with bowed head, weeping silently.

The abrupt sound sent the blood shuddering to her heart. Before her trembling lips could form a word, the door opened and Lord Carhampton stalked into the room.

Then she took firm hold of her courage and fronted him boldly. It was the soldier that looked frightened now, not the woman.

But he had come with a dogged resolve, which he meant to carry through doggedly, savagely, if need be, inflamed by his fierce passion, in which something of hatred mingled.

"Madam!" he said, laying his plumed hat on the table, and deliberately seating himself, though she stood, "I regret if anything in my words or manner when I last had the honour of seeing you appeared to give just ground for displeasure."

The words seemed innocent enough in themselves, but the quick, keen instinct of the woman took fright at the tone of the man's voice, in which there was no hint of regret.

"My Lord Carhampton," she replied calmly, "I shall be most happy, as you desire it, to forget the incident."

Her gentle dignity abashed him. For a moment he could find no further word to say; but only for a moment.

"To be quite frank, madam, I do NOT desire it. Your forgetfulness were even more cruel than your anger. I intreat that you will remember, and forgive."

"My lord! my lord!" and it was anger, not fear, that made her tremble so, "I must beg you to leave me instantly."

"Believe me, madam," he answered sullenly,

"I have a boon to offer better worth your craving, but it has its price."

He had thrown off all assumption of courtesy or respect. There was fierce passion in eyes and voice.

She felt his very presence in the room a degradation to her womanhood. Her cheek paled, her lips trembled, but the brave heart never quailed, for she knew in courage was her last hope. She looked his lordship steadily in the face, and his eyes fell before her scornful gaze.

"Madam!" he began, again trying hard to curb the strong passion that made his voice break and his words trip each other up, "I will speak out plainly. You know that I love you. I loved you as Norah Denvir with an honourable love, which you spurned. I love you still as Norah Blake——"

"With a love which is an insult and dishonour, even in the telling of it."

"It was your turn then; it is my turn now," he went on, ignoring her taunt. "Fate threw this lucky chance into my hands. I would have been a fool to lose it. Remember, I saved your life and your child's life. Am I to have no wages for that service but your contempt?"

"Contempt and loathing!" she answered fiercely; "that is your answer; now go!"

But he stood his ground sullenly. "I am no dog," he answered, "to be driven off with angry words, but a man that knows his own power."

"A glorious power! to insult and frighten a powerless woman!"

"One kind word from your lips, Norah; only one makes you my mistress, and me your devoted slave."

In his eagerness he took two steps towards her, with hands outstretched.

Then the woman's longing at her need for the strong arm and brave heart of him she loved quite mastered her.

"Oh! if *he* were here," she wailed out, "if he were here!"

He broke out in mockery, laughing at her cry.

"You wish him here to die the traitor's death he has so richly merited, and leave you free to a nobler choice."

"Oh, you cur! If he were here you would go down on your knees and whine for mercy."

"Just at present, madam, he needs mercy more than I do."

The exultant malignity in his voice frightened her. Her fear for herself was lost in a greater fear for her husband.

"He is safe, thank God," she cried, "safe beyond the reach of your savagery."

But her trembling voice belied her words. Lord Carhampton was quick to see and grasp his advantage.

"Don't be too sure of that," he answered slowly.

"What do you mean? Is this some new trick to frighten a helpless woman?"

"You love this rebel of yours?"

She gave no answer, but her eager eyes never left his face.

"You would be at some pains to save his back from the cat-o'-nine-tails and his neck from the halter?"

"Why do you torture me?"

"Listen," he went on, in a cold, hard voice that forced belief, "your husband was captured last night. He is my prisoner, bound and gagged, in this house at this moment."

On her love for her husband he rested his own vile hopes, yet it hurt him even then to see how intense that love was.

The cruel blow, struck without warning, went straight to her heart. No merciful oblivion dulled its agony for an instant.

"Oh God! it cannot be; here a prisoner in the power of this vile man, this savage beast without faith or pity."

"Hard words those, madam," Lord Carhamp-

ton interposed; "they will not help your husband."

She fell upon her knees before him, more lovely than ever, he thought, in her utter abandonment. "I take back all that I have said of you. I entreat your forgiveness; have some pity. Oh, I am mad with fear and grief! Spare him! spare him! and I will praise and pray for you while my life lasts."

"His life, madam, rests wholly in your hands," he answered slowly, that she might grasp the meaning of each word.

"With me?" She looked at him in amazement, but her eyes fell before his passionate gaze, and a hot blush burned her face with sudden flame.

"It is a trick!" she cried, "a cowardly trick!" trying hard to force herself to that belief. "He is not here."

"It is so easy to put it to the test."

"How? how?"

"I can in a moment, if you choose, set the man before your eyes."

"You can do that; you will do that. I will bless you all my life!"

"I will do more than that—for your blessing."

In her eagerness she only half heard his words, and quite missed their meaning. Everything was forgotten in the rapturous thoughts of meeting

her husband again. "I shall see him and speak to him!" she cried exultingly.

"I did not say that. You shall see him a prisoner gagged and bound. But it is not well that he should see you—even for his own sake it is not well. Take your place behind that screen" —he burst two or three holes through the screen with his sword point as he spoke—"and you will have instant proof if my words be true or not."

Turning to the door, he gave a brief, whispered order to the sentry at the threshold, who departed at once and did not return.

Then there was dead silence in the room; so intense that Norah could hear the beating of her own heart.

From the garden there came faintly the gay laughter of the child, sporting with a new playmate, and she felt a sudden pang of unreasoning anger that his child could laugh at such a moment.

In the stillness she heard the turning of a key in a lock, and the pushing back of bolts, and the noise of footsteps, and the clatter of weapons, louder it seemed than need be, on the stairs. Her heart gave one wild throb and ceased to beat, when Maurice Blake, bound and gagged, even his feet fastened, so that a few inches was his longest stride, staggered into the room.

As he reached the threshold, his quick glance searching the room, passed the screen without notice, and came back to where Lord Carhampton sat, uneasily fingering his moustache.

Norah behind the screen stood motionless, speechless as a statue, her whole soul in her eyes.

Slowly and awkwardly Maurice moved towards where his lordship sat, and behind him showed the tall, gaunt figure of Sergeant Saunders.

Then surprise snatched a cry from Norah. "Christy!" she exclaimed, "Christy!"

All three men were startled by the sound. It seemed the signal for sudden stir and struggle.

With the swift, silent spring of a wild cat, the gaunt figure of Christy Culkin leaped upon his lordship and pinned him down in the deep chair. One strong hand gripped his throat, the other drove the velvet cushion against his mouth.

Some instinct hushed the cry of joy on Norah's lips as she saw her husband fling gag and cords aside, and rush to Christy's aid.

In those four strong, dexterous hands Lord Carhampton would have been but a baby, even if the sudden surprise of the assault had not robbed him of all power of resistance.

With amazing swiftness he was stripped of his cloak and uniform, and laid in his shirt-sleeves, bound and gagged, on the carpet.

It was part of his torment to see Norah rush to her husband's arms, with no more heed of his presence than of a dog's.

But Christy gave them scant time for endearments. "Hurry! hurry!" he cried, in an anxious undertone; "every minute is worth a life. Be your lave, general," and he rolled the prostrate, helpless body with his foot across the room and set the screen in front of it.

Meanwhile Blake forced on the tight-fitting uniform, pulled the long boots on his feet, and flung the general's military cloak over all. It was a good foot too short for him, but as he threw it half over his shoulder tight under his arm, the lenght was not noticeable.

"Right," said Christy approvingly, "you're quite safe from spies. The general there don't like being watched. Whoever chances to meet you two together will turn his head the other way and let you pass. Down at the far corner of the garden to the right, behind a big pear-tree —you cannot miss it—there's a small door, with heavy bolts on the inside, that opens into the laneway, and then——"

"My boy?" Norah interrupted; "we cannot leave our boy."

"That's all right," Christy answered, "the boy has gone before you with his new maid."

"His new maid?" she cried, with a quick inkling of the truth.

"Is Peggy herself, no less. They'll meet you on the Castlehackett Road outside the town." Then turning to Maurice in a sudden burst of impatience—"You know the way. Quick! quick to the garden; there's not a second to be lost. Well, what is it now?" for neither of them budged an inch.

"What about you?"

"Oh, I'm all right. My plans are well laid."

"But how?"

He growled impatiently in his grizzly moustache, but he saw the quickest way was to tell them all.

"I go back to my prisoner."

"Your prisoner? What prisoner?" Norah exclaimed; "the general?"

"No, the general is safe enough where he is. We can trust him to keep quiet. But I must lock the door upstairs and get an obliging recruit to keep guard on the empty room in my place. I won't be in any great hurry to relieve him, I promise you. Now will you go?"

Nothing loath, they made quickly for the garden. Norah, who had been there twice before, showed the way, her hand clasped tight in her husband's arm.

Christy was right. A soldier who saw them as they came, slunk aside to let them by. They passed down the garden and through the door to the laneway, without mishap, and so safe into the country, where Christy and Peggy and the boy waited with the horses, ready for the road.

Chapter XXVIII

OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

"Just after the war in the year Ninety Eight,
As soon as the boys wor all scattered and bate,
'Twas the custom whenever a peasant was got,
To hang him by trial, barrin' such as was shot."

THEY struck out due West, in the hope of finding shelter and security amongst the mountains of Connemara.

Riding at an easy pace they reached Galway a little after midnight, passed through the town unnoticed, and rode on still to westward towards Oughterard. At dawn they were moving quietly in the broad, cool shadow of a great mountain beyond Oughterard, while in front peak after peak reddened and blazed like a beacon light as each caught flame in turn from the rising sun.

By noon they had found the shelter they sought in a cup-like hollow high up amongst the hills.

Below them stretched a wilderness of lesser peaks with glittering flashes of tiny lakes between. A little spring broke out from the hillside, and fell

cool and deep and clear in a stone niche of its own carving. Trickling over the well's brim, an impatient little stream ran down to the edge of a steep cliff, and leaped and lost itself in diamond spray.

In this fairy dell, where chance had led them, the weary party rested gratefully after their long march, stretched luxuriously on short, close sward, patched here and there with thick, sweet-smelling bunches of purple heath.

The pure soft air of the hills enriched their blood with cheerfulness. Six days they lingered there in restful security. Maurice and Christy were too skilled foragers to starve while mountain sheep grazed wild on the hillside. From the nearest cabin, five miles away, goats' milk and potatoes completed their provender, and the keen mountain air lent flavouring to the simple food.

On the sixth evening Thady appeared amongst them, quietly, suddenly, like a bird alighting from long flight, coming no one knows whence, guided no one knows how.

He had startling news to tell, which he told in short, jerky, unconnected sentences hard to understand. The French and Irish combined, after a series of gallant victories, had been surrounded at Ballinamuck and captured by the enemy's forces, outnumbering them by twenty to one. The French

were made prisoners; their Irish allies mercilessly slaughtered. Through the whole countryside the soldiers were raging now, Thady declared, "like red-hot divils, burnin' and killin'." His news of their own danger startled them from their careless security. The pursuit had been hot and fierce from the first. The pursuers, with Lord Carhampton leading, had headed at once straight for Cloonlara. Before Cloonlara was reached the mistake was discovered, and, like baffled hounds, they had turned back on their own track. The fugitive party had been seen outside Galway in the grey dawn moving towards the mountains. When this news was brought to Lord Carhampton he swore he would search every square yard of Connemara till he caught them. There were half a dozen search parties amongst the mountains, quartering the ground like sporting dogs. The largest, under Lord Carhampton himself, was only five or six miles away. "One of the sentries," Thady said, "bade him the time of day with a gun as he went by."

In grim silence Blake and Christy listened to the rambling story, while Peggy grilled a collop of mutton for Thady's supper, and Norah put the child to sleep, with the fragrant heather bloom for a bed and a hollow of the rock for a cradle.

"The ship, Thady?" Blake asked at last.

"What about the *Western Hope*; is she in Westport yet?"

"She was there when I last saw her," Thady answered enigmatically; "but whether she is there now or not it's meself that cannot say."

"We must take our chance of that," said Blake to Christy; "we must make a bold dash to Castlebar, and then on to Westport."

"You might as well poke your nose into Hell of your accord," Thady interposed; "Castlebar is full of soldiers, and the whole road to Westport is swarming with them like wasps in a hot autumn."

"We might try Cloonlara," Christy ventured, his grey eyes lighting up fiercely, like a wild beast's at bay. "We have men to back us there. We could hold the castle against Carhampton's cowards for a year and a day."

"Madness!" Blake answered shortly; "the road to Cloonlara is sure to be watched, and I'm glad of it, for I don't want to be tempted. Let the poor people there bide in peace. The struggle, long or short, could only end one way. I don't want them butchered for our sakes. I don't want the savageries we witnessed in Wexford and at Claremorris repeated amongst our friends at Cloonlara."

Meanwhile Thady's puzzled thoughts had not got beyond the word "Westport."

"What is the matter with the Pass of Dulough?" he broke in with sudden, startling irrelevance.

"Where's that, Thady?" Blake asked soothingly. He knew how fragile was the thread that held Thady's thoughts together, and what tender handling it needed.

"The short cut to Westport through the big hills," Thady answered. "There's no one knows it barrin' meself, and the mountainy sheep and the eagles that does be always flying and screaming about the place. There's little good to be got out of them same eagles anyhow. They're so wild and proud in themselves, and they never rightly forgave myself for robbin' their nest one day last summer, and be the same token ——"

"How far is it to Westport by that way, Thady?" said Christy insinuatingly, bringing him back to the point.

"It's seven good hours run at the laste." Thady had a way of measuring distance by the time it took himself to cover it, which was not a little perplexing.

"That means a day and a half for us," Christy interpreted to Blake; "you could show us the way, Thady—couldn't you?"

"Troth, I could that, blindfold. It's many a hare I raced through the same mountains, and many a

big fish I pulled, kicking and flopping, out of the black lake below. But I'd like me bit of supper before I start, if it's quite convaynient."

Peggy quickly set the grilled collops and roasted potatoes before him.

"It's a day and a half," he said, as he looked up in her face wistfully, "since my teeth touched anything barrin' themselves, and me on the run most of the time." Yet he ate sparingly, and was soon finished.

"In half an hour we'll be quite ready," Norah answered her husband, when he told her of the proposed night march, making no difficulties, asking no question. She had learned her lesson of prompt action in emergency.

"In less than half an hour they were moving, Indian file, down a rough gulley in the mountain side. Thady led the way, and the others kept close behind, lest he should unconsciously slip away from them like a shadow through the dusk. Little Val, well used to night and journeys, slept warm in his father's strong arms.

Their horses, useless in the rough silent march they had before them, were turned loose and driven off in the direction of Galway, to blind pursuit.

None too soon had they escaped. The net was closing round them fast. Twice in the night they

passed so close to the loyalist patrol that the rough voices and loud laughter of the carousing soldiers came to them distinctly on the still air. Once they almost stumbled into the encampment, thinking it was the light of a peasant's hut they saw.

At dawn, however, they had won clear of the pursuers' lines, and with shadows stretching far before they came up the long narrow valley of Leenane, still bending to the West. In front a tall mountain, that rose sharply into the brightening sky with a deep flush of purple heather on its face, seemed to bar their way.

But Thady climbed its steep side like a goat, so nimbly that even the light-footed Peggy was hard put to it to keep pace with him. Still as they climbed, a dark line in the mountain side widened before their eyes into the opening of a deep gorge running sheer through the hills. At the bottom of this pass a long narrow strip of water lay, fitting the naked angles and curves of the double bordering mountains, dark and smooth and sheeny as a floor of polished black marble. High over the water, clinging close to the mountain-side, a rough path-way led into the gorge.

"There!" cried Thady, with all the pride of ownership, "there's Dulough for you. The straight road runs round the shoulder of Croagh

Patrick into Westport, not three hours from this."

Even in the feverish haste of their flight, the wild sublimity of the scene made its charm felt. At every turn of the rough and narrow pathway, where footing was hard to keep, new beauties opened to their eyes. The wide and rough expanses of the mountain was dotted thickly over with mountain sheep, wilder than deer, and more active. They peeped, with quaint black faces and curly horns, over the ledges of the rocks, or leaped from point to point like rolling stones down the sides of the steepest hills.

Two eagles, with wide wings spread, floated far up in the blue sky, so still they seemed to enhance the stillness of the morning. But all at once, and without warning, one great bird dropped from the high heaven like a meteor, growing larger as he fell, and plunged cruel talons in a frightened lamb that ran bleating by the side of its bleating mother. With the struggling prey clutched tight in that strong grasp, it went up staggering and labouring through the air with heavily beating wings to where his mate sat now, on the highest pinnacle of the cliff, clear outlined against the clear sky.

Instinctively Christy's rifle dropped to rest, but Blake's warning touch on his arm changed his

purpose, and spared the young eagles their parent and their food.

All the morning had been bright and clear. But in the early afternoon a heavy fog came up from the sea, so close and thick they were at much pains to keep the narrow way, and could not tell when they had passed out from the long, narrow gorge on to the shoulder of the mountain, that sloped curve upon curve up to the sharp, clear-cut cone of Croagh Patrick. Later, a light wind sprang up and broke the mist and sent it rolling in great masses of soft white wool down the steep slopes of the hills. Now and again they could catch a glimpse of clear sky and glint of the bright waters of Clew Bay through the rents in the thick curtain of white cloud.

Blake set his little boy down where the heather grew deep and soft in the shelter of a projecting rock, and watching his chance he searched the bay with his field-glass through the widening gaps in the cloud. He drew a deep sigh of relief, with a muttered "Thank God!" as he saw the sharp, clear spars of the American schooner at the very mouth of the Quay, easily distinguished from the heavy, clumsy rigging of the vessels closer into land.

The next moment he closed the glass with a snap, and dropped behind the projecting rock where the child lay.

"Lie still!" he whispered to the others, whom his motion had already warned. "The Westport road, not half a mile away, is full of soldiers coming and going. There is an encampment there to the right amongst the trees close to an old abbey, and a big house by the roadside.

With beating hearts they crouched and crawled along the bare mountain-side, while the mist grew momentarily lighter, till they came to a deep channel lined thick with brown heather, at whose bottom a mere thread of water ran trickling down the side of the mountain.

There for the moment at least they were safe.

"We came near walking straight into the enemy's mouth," Christy muttered. "That cursed mist——"

"Don't curse the mist, Christy," Blake answered cheerily, "it saved us from prying eyes when we most needed shelter."

"But now?"

"We'll find some plan, never fear. The schooner is there right at the mouth of the Quay, ready to start. That's one comfort."

"It's a cold comfort when we cannot get to her."

"By land—no."

"Well, we cannot fly to her."

"Here, take the glass; creep up to the edge of that rock; look to the right and tell me what you see?"

"I see the schooner plain enough; there's no mistaking her clean spars against the sky."

"But where—you can see where?"

"Right at the end of the Quay to my thinking. She is making ready to slip away quietly."

"Not without us, I hope. Here's my plan. About six miles from here, twelve from Westport, there's a little village, and beyond that—about a mile or so—there's a small harbour or inlet where fishing boats are laid up. Thady knows the place most likely."

"As well as me hand knows the way to me mouth," said Thady.

"I don't see how that's to help," growled Christy.

"I'll tell you then," Blake went on cheerily. "We will be safe here till dusk. Then we will slip quietly down to the road beyond where the soldiers are stationed. With good luck and Thady to guide us, we should be able to get safe to the harbour, and beg, borrow, or steal a boat."

"And then?"

"And then take our chance. The water is open to us if the land is not; and it's only five hours' row across the bay to the schooner.

Chapter XXIX

THE END IS NOT YET

"To happier lands beyond the sea,
Her name and fame they proudly bore;
Yet in the land of Liberty
They felt the chain their country bore.

With hearts like theirs to do and dare,
Those gallant men of Ninety Eight;
Come! let the whole world hear us swear
To honour and to emulate."

VERY slowly the hours went by as it seemed to their impatience. The red sun seemed to hang motionless over the sea far out in the west, setting sky and wave in a flame.

At last the flaming rim touched the water. Slowly, very slowly, the broad, bright disc went down, and the deepening dusk gave the signal for their departure.

All went well with them at first. They got down the hillside to the road, safe and unobserved. They had made their way good through the village of Louisburgh, when, without warning, a patrol of yeomen leaped out from the shelter of a ditch to the road in front of them.

Luckily the light was bad and the men were gloriously drunk, for the potheen was plentiful in the district. The soldiers thought they had captured a covey of frightened peasants coming home from the market. The foremost of the two made a drunken grab at Peggy to snatch a kiss. Christy Culkin's fist fell like a sledge hammer, and the fellow reeled and tumbled headlong into the ditch at the roadside.

But his comrade saw the blow and raised his musket with a drunken lurch, and fired without waiting to take aim. The bullet flew skywards, and a second blow, this time from Blake, sent him sprawling on top of his companion.

Too late! The mischief was done. The hills took up the loud report, and tossed to and fro in answering thunder. As the reverberating echoes died sullenly away into the silent night, their quick ears caught close at hand the sound of hurrying feet on the hard road, and faint and far off the hoof strokes of galloping horses.

"It will be a hard run for it now," Blake said shortly. He shifted his infant to his right shoulder and gave his left hand to Norah, whose loving clasp, that never trembled in his, warmed his courage. Close behind came Christy and Peggy at full speed. Thady shot swiftly to the front, faster and faster in his excitement as the

shouts and footsteps of the pursuing soldiers thickened in the air behind them. His flying figure blending with the dusk had almost vanished from their view when Blake, whose eyes were like a cat's, saw, or thought he saw, it wheel sharply to the right and vanish. A few moments later they turned down the same narrow opening leading to the sea. It was a long, narrow laneway, a mile or more, with high banks of smooth sod and a floor of soft white sand where their flying feet sank to the ankles. But they laboured steadily on and found the sea at last, splashing softly amongst the weeds and stones at the end.

To Blake's searching eyes, vaguely outlined against the lighter darkness of the sky, showed the dim figure of Thady seated now on a black rock, his feet splashing softly in the black sea, whose waves were fringed and seamed with white phosphorescent light.

"Where are the boats, Thady?" Blake asked in a whisper.

"Sorra wan of them is here at all, at all," Thady answered cheerfully. "It's the saison for the men to be out fishing."

The noise of the pursuit came to them from the far end of the narrow track. The foremost of their pursuers in their hot haste had overrun the turn from the road. But those behind had

found it, and now the whole wild rout came down on them with exultant shouts.

They were caught in a trap.

Nearer and nearer the pursuers came. They could hear the curses of the men as their horses floundered along through the deep, fine sand.

The child, half-asleep and frightened by the sound, broke out into a shrill cry. An exultant shout of laughter answered him, and the enemy came faster on, assured of their prey.

Even at that supreme moment Blake's heart gave one wild throb of joy and hope.

Could that be a boat that he saw faintly outlined as a ghost under the curve of the bank? He had looked for it on the water and found it on the land. Yet he would not trust his eyes till he had felt the rim of the boat with his hand and found the long oars along her sides.

Then he shouted to the others: "Quick! quick! down with her to the water!"

They obeyed without a word; there was no time even for surprise. Under the impetus of six strong arms the boat ran clattering down through the rough shingle and splash into the black sea, which broke into silver round her as she swung loose on the angle of her keel with her bow afloat. Before they quite realized what had happened, the women and child were lifted

through the water and set in the stern; and strong arms straining on the long oars, the boat shot out over the black water into the black night, leaving a glistening trail of silver in her wake.

Before the oars could reach their places in the rowlocks the soldiers were down at the water's edge. For a moment they were bewildered to find the place empty. But the splash of the oars in the water, and the phosphorescent glow around the moving boat, told them, too late, their prey were escaping. Rifles were levelled and fired into the darkness. The hills echoed to the loud reports, and the harmless bullets fell far out to sea, and, glancing and splashing like leaping fish, dotted the black water with specks of silver.

Steadily, yet swiftly too, they got the long oars between the worn rowlocks; dip, dip, dip, the blades splashed into the black water, making a livid white blotch at each stroke, and the boat shot out into the open sea with liquid moonlight rippling at her prow.

"Where to?" Thady asked quietly. He had coiled himself up in the stern of the boat with the tiller strings between his fingers.

"To Westport," Blake answered; "we should make it in four hours at this pace."

The boat turned in a smooth, clear curve, and the two strong men, bending and swinging to

their stroke, made the water rise like an ostrich plume at her prow, and left a narrow track long and white, like a ribbon of light, in their wake.

They had not been rowing five minutes when Blake's ear caught a bubbling, gurgling sound almost at his feet, and his eyes found a curious blotch of light, as it seemed, swaying and dancing at the bottom of the boat. He put down his hand, and it went, with cold splash, up to the wrist in water, which pressed upwards against his palm from a yawning seam.

In an instant he knew the meaning of it all. This one leaky boat was left for repairs, drawn up on the beach when the others had put to sea.

They were afloat on the Atlantic in a sieve. Then for the first time his heart failed suddenly. Stealthily as a wild beast the strangling waters crept on them in the lonely sea. From that chill death he felt there was no escape. But soon his courage, fed and made strong by a thousand dangers overpassed, revived.

"The boat is leaking a little, I think," he said quietly; "we must bail her out; our hats will serve."

"My hat is leakier than the boat, I'll warrant you," Thady answered with a laugh. But he dived into the locker at the stern as he spoke

and fished out two battered tin vessels, which Norah and Peggy seized, and they ladled away so dexterously that the water seemed to flow out in a continuous stream over the boat's side.

"Turn her head to Clare Island, Thady," Blake continued quietly, "it's not half the distance. We can wait and signal to the schooner as she goes by."

Again the boat went round, more heavily now and in a wider curve, and the two strong men, straining at the oars till every muscle ached, dragged her through the sea. But fast as the splashing stream flowed over the side, the quick, bubbling spring gained on them and the water deepened in the boat. Blake shouted and tossed his hat over his shoulder to Thady at the stern. Without a word Thady caught it, and began ladling away with the quick, regular motion of a machine, while now and again a deft touch of the tiller rope kept the boat's head straight for the massive bulk of Clare Island, dimly outlined against the sky.

Still the insistent water gained more and more, while the boat went staggering heavily on, urged by the desperate strength of the oarsmen.

Meanwhile the child, pitiably unconscious of their impending death, dabbled with delight in the treacherous water, and searched the sea with eager eyes to right and left.

Suddenly the shrill childish treble was heard clear over the swish and splash of the water, tremulous with excitement.

"Look! look!" the boy cried, "see a ghost coming upon the sea."

The father glanced over his shoulder, and the sight sent the blood thrilling to his heart.

Away towards Westport a greyish-white shadow, vast and vague, was stealing softly through the dusk.

At the first sight he guessed the truth. It was the American schooner he saw, with all sails set to the light breeze that freshened from the shore, and her prow turned straight for the New World.

"Christy! Thady!" he shouted. But it was not needed. They too saw and knew. For the third time the boat's course changed, and they pulled like giants to cross the track of the flying schooner.

With teeth close set, with every muscle strained, they tore their oars through the heavy sea.

In vain, in vain; the treacherous water found new leaks as the weighted boat sunk lower and lower, and hung back like lead against the desperate push of the oar blades.

"We cannot reach her," Maurice cried in despair, and he shipped his oar. "There is one

hope left; she may hear. Shout together: it is our last chance."

They drew deep breath and raised their voices in a desperate cry, that seemed to fill the whole silent heaven with clamorous sound. Silence followed, so intense that the ripple of the water, rushing through the leaking seams, was like the noise of a mountain stream.

But the schooner, with hope and life and kindly welcome on her decks, slid softly and swiftly through the night, unconscious of their agony.

Again they cried, and again hopeless silence followed. In that second silence Thady broke suddenly into a peal of vacant and jarring laughter.

"I'll wake them up," he said, and thrusting his little finger into his mouth he whistled; ear-piercing, brain-piercing, keen as a pang of intolerable pain, the shrill sound clove the still air like a knife.

Holding their breath they watched the pale grey phantom far out to sea.

Did their eyes cheat them? Did their hopes lie? No. The motion ceased as they looked; the shape changed. The broad expanse narrowed to a white line; the schooner was bearing straight down on them.

Thady's whistle rang out again, ear-piercing

as before, and with straining ears they thought they heard a faint, answering sound.

Hope gave them new strength and courage. The useless oars were cast aside; bailing frantically with vessels, hats, and hands, they kept back the rush of the impatient sea. All round the boat the water splashed, and the white phosphorescent light leaped and glowed, a guiding beacon to the oncoming schooner.

Nearer she came, and nearer the outline of her sails grew more distinct; they could see the white ripple at her rushing prow.

"Boat ahoy!" a strident voice sang out at last.

"Help! we are foundering," was Blake's reply.

She kept her swift course straight forward to half a cable's length; wheeled smoothly as a bird on the wing, and paused with shivering sails, and dropped a boat from her davits into the sea.

The boat shot out for the flash of white light with the black blotch in its centre. The rescuers found three men and two women up to their waists in water, bailing for their lives, and a weeping child perched on its father's shoulder.

Not one moment too soon!

Even as they stepped over her low rim the water-logged boat swayed and sank in the gurgling water.

Captain Costelloe welcomed them on the schooner's deck. His amazement and delight passed all bounds when he found Blake himself and his wife and child amongst the rescued.

In an instant the whole vessel was astir with the orderly, purposeful bustle of shipboard. Dry clothes and hot food and drink were provided as if by magic.

Within half an hour after they had stepped over the schooner's side, the boy was cosily asleep, his soft cheek pressed to his mother's bosom. Norah and Peggy lay in their snug bunks in the same cabin, dreamily awake, but conscious only of the delicious languor that comes of fatigue and danger safely overpassed. Thady, quite impervious to fatigue or danger, flitted restless and delighted over the vessel from stem to stern, and Blake and Christy told the story of their adventures over a steaming bowl of rum punch in the captain's cabin.

With sails that stiffened in the growing wind the *Western Hope* crept easily round the great bulk of Clare Island during the night. When the sun of a new day came up behind the hills, crimsoning the sky and water, she dashed the foam of the open ocean from her prow, and no speck of land lay between her and the Western world.

Her boy by her side, Norah leant over the rails at the stern of the ship, and watched with wistful eyes the faint blue outlines of the loved and lovely land that swiftly faded into the distance.

High and far off, the clear-cut cone of Croagh Patrick showed, and the lesser hills rose around in delicate blue curves against the warmer tint of the sky. The sun's rays lay on the rippling water, like a long golden path back to the land.

Though freedom and happiness and love were all before her, the heart of the Irishwoman was hot and heavy, and her eyes bright with unshed tears.

"Look, Val! look well," she said, as she lifted him in her arms and pointed to the fading outlines of the hills, "that is Ireland; our own Ireland. You may never see it again, but you must never forget Ireland till you die. You must love her always, the best of all the lands under the sun; and your heart and help must be always with her in her need."

The deep voice of her husband, who had come softly up behind them while she spoke, whispered solemnly, "I swear it"; and the sweet, clear voice of the child echoed the words "I swear."

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